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# EXCITING WESTERN

DEC.

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

THE PONY EXPRESS PAYS OFF
*An Alamo Paige Novelet*
By REEVE WALKER

THE *DUDE WRANGLER*
*An Action Novel*
By WILLIAM POLK

NOT BY A DAM SITE
*A Navajo Raine Novelet*
By JACKSON

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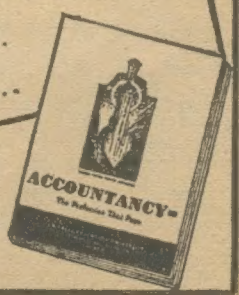

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VOL. 8, No. 3 — EVERY STORY BRAND NEW — DECEMBER, 1944

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**By WILLIAM POLK**

**Tom Glenning Returns to the Bar 2 Only to Find Trouble Stalking the Ranch—and Barges Into Desperate Six-gun Battle That Calls for All His Iron Nerve and Trigger Savvy!** ..... **11**

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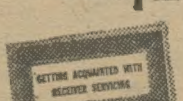


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*A Department for Readers Conducted by CAPTAIN RANGER*

SEEMS like a lot of farseeing hombres and hombresses are including the West in their plans for the future. They crave to get out where they can breathe plenty of good, clean, free American air and have elbow room to move around in.

Many of 'em are talking western farm lands, cut-over timber tracts in Pacific Northwest, hideaway spots in Idaho, or getting land near some of the great Government irrigation projects where water makes lush crops grow on soil that formerly was mostly sand and sagebrush.

It's a healthy inclination, this leaning a fellow gets to own land of his own. Carrying it out entails a heap of work—downright hard, physical labor. Perhaps hardship until you get settled in your new location. But work and hardship are two things pioneers have always had to expect—issues they never tried to dodge.

That's how come the West got built up to be the grand country it is today!

## Specialties in Farming

What we figure on discussing now, however, is not general farming, but special kinds of farming that may give a man with a knack for such things a chance to pick up some extra cash once he gets started in his new location or on his new career.

Like other businesses farming has specialties and side lines. Things like peppermint, pigeons, cranberries, raising muskrats in swampy otherwise useless land. Even raising food fish in farm ponds can be made a sideline. This latter is an old habit in Europe, though it is a comparatively new twist to farming here.

As a rule these specialties require a certain amount of special knowledge. They should generally be started on a fairly small scale and without too much investment to begin with until you see how you make out with them.

Consider them, at first anyhow, a sideline rather than a substitute for general crop farming. That way you can let the specialty add to your farm income—instead of being dependent on it for support at least in the initial stages.

If you are a family man and have some active, outdoor-loving kids to consider, some of these farm sidelines are definitely good ideas.

You can do the planning and supervising, and the kids can do a lot of the work, perhaps for a share of the proceeds. That way, too, much of your own time won't be taken up in a branch business so to speak.

## Séed Production

Getting down to cases did you ever think of raising garden flowers and vegetables for their seeds for a change? More than a half million acres of good rich land are devoted to producing vegetable seeds in the United States according to the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture. And the bulk of these seeds are raised in the Pacific Coast and other Western States.

Why? For one thing a dry climate free from disease is an advantage. So are broad spaces because fields that can be scattered to avoid cross-pollination in flower seeds are a big help.

Cabbage, beet, spinach and other cool-crop seeds come largely from Washington and California. Peas come from Washington, Idaho and the Northwest generally. Lettuce and carrot seeds are grown heavily in Idaho and California.

Flower seeds are grown extensively in California and in Colorado, and of course there are some fields in the East as well—in New York and Pennsylvania for instance.

Peppermint, heretofore grown mainly in Indiana and Michigan, provides a useful essential oil. Some 40,000 acres of it are grown annually in this country. That's another farm specialty.

Cranberries, as typically American as the Thanksgiving and Christmas turkey, grow in cool, acid, sandy peat bogs. Growing the berries commercially requires a special type of land and considerable special knowledge. The annual crop from roughly 30,000 cultivated acres throughout the country runs to a value of between 6 and 7 million dollars each year. Washington and Oregon are important Western cranberry States.

## A Profitable Business

Blueberries frequently can be grown in what is often referred to as "wasteland." Be-

*(Continued on page 8)*

# Three months after taking your course
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*says Miss Rosie Montemurro of Vancouver, B. C., Canada*

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**"My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty"**

Look at the diagram. The first note on the music is "C." Follow the dotted line to the keyboard and locate "C" on the piano. Find the other notes the same way. Now strike the notes as indicated and you'll be playing the melody of that famous patriotic hymn, "America." Easy as A-B-C, isn't it?

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## TRAIL BLAZERS

*(Continued from page 6)*

lieve it or not merely the harvesting of wild blueberries, and their close relatives the huckleberries, in sections where they grow throughout the United States, provides the amazing return of approximately 10 million dollars in a good year. So says the Department of Agriculture. And they ought to know. They have all the facts and figures right at their finger-tips.

Rabbits, a dandy sideline starter for the youngsters, are not too hard to raise and care for. Some are grown in every State in the Union.

Right now the war has increased the demand for rabbit meat and the small farm rabbitry is playing its own part in supplementing our domestic meat supply. Rabbit fur is a by-product of the meat production.

### Raising Squabs

Pigeons, or raising young squabs, does not require much extra room, or entail as a sideline too much extra work. Yet they can be developed into a fairly lucrative "specialty" on most any farm.

Squabs are marketed just before they are ready to leave the nest, that is when they are about 25 to 28 days old. At that time the best commercial breeds such as King, Carneau, Swiss, Mondain and French Mondain ought to weigh between 15 and 24 ounces. Tender squabs are a delicacy that virtually always find, a ready, sustained market.

If you happen to get on a tract of land that holds acres of rough, or marshy "wasteland" consider the chances of increasing the output of natural wildlife fur-bearers it contains.

Then by conservation methods of planned, limited trapping skim off the cream of the fur crop each year. It is a sideline the boys as well as you will most likely enjoy. And it can bring in appreciable cash returns.

*(Continued on page 77)*


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**Third Prize .....$100 in War Bonds**
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Send your entry to Contest Editor at the address shown below.

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Frontier Asthma Co. 487-N Frontier Bldg.
462 Niagara Street Buffalo 1, New York

The gun in Glenning's hand thundered, and the little Jap's features became a red mask

# THE DUDE WRANGLER

## By WILLIAM POLK

*Tom Glenning Returns to the Bar 2 Only to Find Trouble Stalking the Ranch—and Barges into Desperate Six-Gun Battle that Calls for All His Iron Nerve and Trigger Savvy!*

### CHAPTER I

*Back Home*

THE loose-limbed rider seemed part of the spotted pony as he turned his horse's head into the long drive that stretched between the cotton woods up to the sprawling ranchhouse. He cast one brief glance upward as he passed under the sign that spanned the drive. He read:

BAR 2 RANCH
G. Lambeau, Prop.

"I'm home again, Scoundrel," he told the pinto. "It's been a long time. And it looks as though the new owner hasn't made many changes on this spread."

Half-way up the drive, he reined in and gazed about, his eyes brightening as he looked over the land that once had belonged to his father, and his father's father before him. The sun that had blazed through a cloudless sky all day was beginning to sink and the buttes to the west already were donning their purple shadows in preparation for the night.

In the corral, beyond the house, he could make out a dozen or more horses. There were lights in the bunkhouse and in the main ranchhouse. The smoke that whirled from the big chimney of the main building was

fragrant as the rider sniffed the air.

His eyes grew deep as he looked at the ranchhouse. The new owner, he saw, had enlarged one wing of the place, but for the main part, the building was the same as when he had left the ranch—how many years before?

"Too many," he murmured. "I never should have left. I should have stayed and stuck it out—banks, mortgages, drought and all."

He hunched his shoulders, as though shaking off the memories that had crowded down on him, and clucked his tongue to set the paint into motion.

As he drew near the house, he saw that a man was awaiting his arrival on the broad veranda.

This, he told himself, must be Lambeau, the new owner of Bar-2. Lambeau had been described as a big man and this fellow on the porch certainly was all of that. In the fading light, the rider could make out that Lambeau—if it were he—was bull-necked, thick-shouldered, slightly squat for all his height.

The man wore a ten-gallon hat and a checked shirt open at the throat, well-cut riding breeches and cunningly fashioned cordovan boots. From his wide mouth jutted a long, thick cigar.

THE rider reined in at the foot of the steps and touched a hand to the flat-crowned, wide-brimmed gray hat he wore.

"Hi," he said easily. "You must be Mr. Lambeau."

The big man's eyes were noncommittal. When he spoke, his words came around the cigar he held clenched in his teeth. His voice was deep, heavy, deliberate.

"I might be," he admitted. "Were yuh lookin' for me?"

"I'm lookin' for a job," the rider said. "Name of Glenning, Tom Glenning. Heard tell yuh might be needin' a hand."

Lambeau's eyes failed to reflect the surprise he must have experienced in hearing the rider's name. Casually, the big man removed the cigar from his mouth and flicked off its ash. He kept his gaze fixed on the mounted man.

"Glenning?" he said. "Any relation of Ed Glenning?"

"He was my father," the rider explained. "Our family owned this spread, one time."

"And lost it," Lambeau said bluntly.

Tom Glenning shrugged ruefully as he nodded.

"Reckon I did the losin'," he acknowledged. "Had a run of bad luck and I guess I ain't any genius as a business man. Seems like I was cut out to be a good hand, and nothin' more."

He waited, while the paint fidgeted uneasily. He quieted the horse with a word and a hand on the animal's neck. Lambeau puffed at the cigar, sending thick, fragrant clouds of tobacco smoke into the still twilight air.

"I don't know," the big man said finally. "I don't know whether we need any new hands or not. And if we did—well, from what they tell me, there was some hard feelin's attached to the sale of this spread."

Tom Glenning shook his head quietly.

"Yuh heard wrong," he said firmly. "I didn't hold any hard feelin's about losin' the place. I knew I had it comin' to me. Yuh see, I was always kind of wild, and when Dad shoved along, I couldn't seem to get my feet on the ground. Then, when I found out I'd have to really buckle down and do some fast ridin' and ropin' to hold the spread, it was too late. But there was nobody I could blame except myself, Mr. Lambeau."

The thick man on the veranda contemplated the end of his cigar studiously. Then he looked up at the rider again.

"What yuh been doin' since yuh left?" he asked with that same bluntness.

Tom Glenning felt the color rise in his face and bit back the retort that had sprung to his lips. It was none of Lambeau's business what he had been doing, he told himself. In the West, the question never was what have you done, but what can you do?

Still, he was after a job and it was important—imperative—that he keep his temper.

He wanted to work on the old place, work as a hand, as a laborer—anything.

"I been here and there," he told the man with the cigar. "I traveled the rodeo circuit for a while and then I worked in movies for a couple of months, doublin' for the handsome hero in the trick ridin' shots. Been pretty near all over the country since I dragged out of these parts."

"And haven't got a dime to show for it," Lambeau grunted, with a hint of contempt in his voice.

Again, Tom Glenning flushed, and again he kept his temper with an obvious effort. He managed a weak grin.

"Guess yuh're right," he admitted. "I've got my hoss and my saddle and the clothes I'm wearin'. I've got my blanket roll and a good rope. And I'm after a job."

"But why here?" Lambeau asked curiously. "I should think this would be the last place in the State yuh'd want to work, havin' owned this spread once."

"It's just another ranch to me," Tom lied. "All that business about ownin' this place once is just water over the dam now. They told me in town that yuh were takin' on hands and a job's a job."

Lambeau looked past the rider, toward the horizon that now was painted by the setting sun.

Time and again the steel-shod hoofs smashed downward

"Yuh know," he said thoughtfully, "that we've made this place into a dude ranch now. Mebbe yuh wouldn't like to work dudes. They're different from cows, yuh know."

"I worked dudes in Nevada," Tom answered, "and if yore brand is any worse than some of them I met up with there, yuh shore have got a prize crop. I got so's I couldn't look at a pair of slacks without shudderin'."

LAMBEAU permitted himself a faint smile and tossed the half-smoked cigar over the railing. The sparks scattered wildly for a second, then winked out, leaving the ruby eye of the cigar glowing steadily in the shadows. Glenning edged the paint over toward the butt and Scoundrel obediently stamped out the cigar, pounding the butt daintily with a forehoof.

"It's kind of dry," Tom Glenning explained apologetically. "I noticed how dry it was ridin' up here from town."

Lambeau nodded casually.

"Should have been more careful," he said. "Thanks. That's quite a hoss."

"He—he's a good hoss," Glenning said. "I won him from a feller at Cheyenne. About that job, Mr. Lambeau—"

"I . . . Oh, hello, Gail."

Glenning's hat came off his head as a girl came through the front door and walked up beside Lambeau. Where the man was thick, she was slim, and even in the uncertain light Glenning could see that she was beautiful. Her eyes were frank and direct as she looked at the man on horseback. Her eyes, Glenning decided, would be blue, to go with the black hair that was arranged neatly on her head.

"Dinner's ready, Dad," the girl said.

Tom Glenning felt a shock. Was this lithe girl the daughter of the bulky man with the blunt voice?

"What a beautiful pony!" she exclaimed. "And what's his name?"

"Scoundrel, ma'am," Glenning drawled. "He earned his name, too. Sometimes, he's downright ornery, in a friendly sort of way."

The girl came down off the veranda and walked up to Scoundrel's head. Her hands stroked the paint's muzzle expertly and the horse gently nudged the girl's shoulder in reply.

"He's an old flirt," she laughed. "Look at the way he—"

"Er—Gail," said Lambeau, "we'd better be gettin' in to eat. You can go around to the bunkhouse, Glenning. See Watson, my foreman. He'll tell yuh whether or not we need a hand. He does all the hirin'. Come, Gail."

He turned his broad back on Glenning and stalked into the ranchhouse. Gail gave Scoundrel's muzzle a farewell pat and looked up at Glenning, her eyes faintly shadowed.

"I think there's a place open," she said in a low voice. "I heard Watson saying something about two of the boys going in the Service. I'm pretty sure there's a job for you."

"Thanks, ma'am," said Tom Glenning gravely. "I shore could use one."

"Gail!" came a booming voice from within the open door of the ranchhouse. "We're waitin'!"

The girl started to speak, changed her mind and turned to run up the steps. At the doorway, she looked back once, then slipped inside the house. Tom Glenning carefully replaced his hat on his head as he pulled the pinto's head toward the bunkhouse.

"Nice," he told himself. "But that father of hers shore ain't what I'd call over-hospitable."

He tethered Scoundrel to the hitching-rack and walked to the door of the bunkhouse. His walk held none of the bow-legged awkwardness peculiar to the average rider, even though Glenning's boots were of the typical high-heeled variety. The man had a sort of easy grace on the ground, as well as in the saddle.

He paused outside the bunkhouse door, his memories racing back to the days when he had been a child and this place had been his favorite playground. It had been here that he had listened to the stories told by the punchers—stories that doubtless were ninety-nine per cent fiction, but which still fascinated him when he recalled them.

"Shorty," Angus, "Trey-spot"—what had happened to them? Had they all gone over the long trail, or were they now lounging in some other bunkhouse, embroidering on the stories which grew more miraculous with each retelling?

They had told him in town that none of the old bunch was still at Bar-2. They had all drifted on when Tom Glenning had lost the ranch; drifted on and into oblivion, as cowboys always had and, Glenning told himself, probably always would.

HE BANISHED the crowding memories and raised his knuckles to rap on the door of the bunkhouse. The subdued hum of conversation that had been half-heard before his knock halted abruptly.

"Come in!" somebody bawled.

He stepped inside and looked around the long, narrow room. Half a dozen hands lounged on the bunks and chairs scattered around the place. Three men sat at a table, cards in their hands and match sticks arranged in little piles beside them.

Magazines of the girly-girly variety lay scattered about the room and the walls were adorned by pin-up pictures of young ladies wearing vivid smiles and little else. The air was thick with tobacco smoke and there was the warm, friendly smell of horses and leather and clean wool.

"Hi," Tom Glenning said, as all eyes swung toward him. "I'm lookin' for the foreman, Watson."

One of the card players detached himself from his chair and stood up.

"I'm Watson," he said.

"Name of Glenning," Tom explained. "The boss told me to see yuh about a job, if yuh have one."

## CHAPTER II

### *New Job*

THE bunkhouse was silent as Watson, a gnarled man with a drooping mustache, eyed Tom Glenning. There was no hint of welcome in the place. Glenning felt every eye in the room fixed on him in a taut stillness that did not belong in a Western bunkhouse.

"I don't know whether I need another hand or not," Watson said finally. "Have yuh ever wrangled dudes?"

"From Reno to New Jersey," Tom grinned. "I've rode herd on some of the cussedest dudes yuh ever set eyes on. One place, they even had me wearin' chaparejos with silver trimmin's, and a red bandanna around my neck. That was in Jersey, where the toughest brush we met up with was pussy willows."

The foreman did not smile. His eyes held Glenning's in a steady cold stare.

"Yuh got a hoss?" he asked.

"I got me a little paint outside," Glenning said. "He ain't much, but he earns his feed. I'd like a chance to work for yuh, Watson."

A burly man with a broken nose spoke from the bunk where he lay sprawled.

"We shore could use another hand," he observed. "Since Pete and Walt left, we've been carryin' too much of a load."

"I'm hirin' around here, Monk," Watson said, in a clipped voice. He turned back to Glenning. "Well, if the boss told yuh to see me, I guess it's all right. Yuh can bring in yore roll. We eat after the dudes is fed, which ought to be in an hour. That'll give yuh a chance to feed yore hoss and wash up. Yuh say yore name's Glenning?"

"Tom Glenning," the new arrival explained.

"Didn't a family name of Glenning own this spread once?" Watson asked.

"Uh-huh," Glenning replied, nodding. He turned toward the door and spoke over his shoulder. "But that was quite a while ago." Then he left to care for Scoundrel.

Behind him, the men looked at each other, their eyes narrowed. Watson brushed his moustache carefully.

"Glenning," he muttered. "The boss must know what he's doin'. But it seems like beddin' down with a rattler to let that feller come onto this place to work."

"He knows what he's doin'," volunteered the man the foreman had called "Monk." "Lambeau ain't made any mistakes yet."

"Which is a good thing for us," said another cowboy judiciously.

"I think that Mr. Tom Glenning ain't goin' to be with us long," a third man offered. "I think mebbe he'll suddenly join the Army, like Walt and Pete did."

"Shut up!" Watson ordered. "You and yore gab will get us all—"

He broke off as Tom Glenning came back into the bunkhouse, his bed roll over his shoulder.

Although Glenning asked no questions, it did not take him too long to find out that Bar-2 Ranch, under Lambeau, was a peculiar sort of dude ranch. The hands were uncommunicative, taciturn. There was none of the usual bantering that took place in a bunkhouse. The men seemed tense, suspicious.

Gail Lambeau, he discovered, was George Lambeau's stepdaughter.

"Which," he told himself, "explains why she's so different from that big hulk who calls himself her dad."

The men, Glenning also learned, had no great love for Lambeau. From remarks in the bunkhouse it seemed that the big man was respected, in a certain strange way, but feared, for some reason.

In Glenning's day, the term "the boss" had been spoken with an undertone of deep-seated love. When these hands spoke of "the boss," it was with a bitterness that could not be missed.

The evening meal, served in the great dining room of the ranchhouse, was plentiful and good. Tom Glenning kept his eyes on his plate, hardly daring to look around the room for fear of the memories that would come crowding in on him. Still, the urge proved too strong to repress and he found himself looking about the place, seeking out familiar objects that he had known from childhood.

That corner was where his mother used to keep her sewing box. A giant radio stood there now. The buffalo head still was over the fireplace, peering down at the room from its little eyes. The blankets, the old guns—most of them were in their accustomed places, where Glenning had left them when he had gone away.

HE WAS covertly examining the room when he heard the scrape of chairs and saw the other men getting to their feet.

"Sit still, boys," Gail Lambeau ordered.

"Go ahead with your supper. I just wanted to tell you that somebody's been elected to play the guitar and do some singing tonight. There's a moon and the guests want a steak roast over by the willows. Who's brave enough to volunteer?"

There was a muted groan from several of the boys.

Watson industriously stroked his mustache, frowning.

"Let's see," he said. "Billy and Lafe worked the last party, so it ain't their turn. Monk, here, has got a voice like a coyote with a knot in its tail and—" He looked at Glenning.

"Can you sing?" he asked. "Or can yuh play a gee-tar?"

GLENNING hesitated and felt Gail's eyes on him.

"I can't guarantee how good it will be," he said, "but I can sing and play good enough to keep from gettin' lynched, if I try."

"Good," said Watson decisively. "Yuh don't have to be no Bing Crosby. Give them dudes a moon and some steak and anybody who don't croak is all right with them. You do the singin' and playin'. Monk will handle the fire and the food."

Gail smiled at Glenning as she turned to go.

"That's fine," she said. "We'll start out about nine o'clock."

She paused, then said, "I—I'm glad you landed a place here."

"Thank yuh, ma'am," replied Glenning. "I hope I can fill the bill."

"I'm sure you can," the girl said brightly. "See you at nine, then."

The moon was casting its silvery brilliance over the scenery, hours later, when the little band of dudes jogged away from the ranchhouse.

Tom Glenning rode with Gail Lambeau, Scoundrel matching the strides of the little buckskin she had mounted.

Some distance ahead, he could make out the winking fire that Monk, having gone on ahead in the buckboard, had lighted. Behind the dudes chattered and laughed, occasionally bursting into snatches of song.

"It's a beautiful night, isn't it, Mr. Glenning?" Gail asked.

She raised a hand to brush back a tendril of hair that had escaped the scarf she had twisted around her head.

"It's 'Tom,' ma'am," Glenning replied easily. "And, yes, it's beautiful, all right. Don't think I've ever seen a place prettier than the willows on a night like this. Used to—" He broke off.

"My father has told me that your family used to own this spread," Gail said quickly. "Some of those lovely old things we found here when we took the place must have belonged to your family."

"Most of them were my mother's, I reckon," Glenning acknowledged. "When I—when I left the place I just rode off and left everything where it was. Somehow, I couldn't get myself to move it. It had always been where it was, yuh see, and I figgered it ought to stay there."

"I know," the girl said gently. "Everything belongs just where it is. But it must be . . . Well, isn't it hard for you to come back here?"

"No, ma'am," said Glenning. "It's not so hard. I've got to work to live and I reckon I'd rather be workin' here, at what used to be my home, than in a strange place. 'Course, it's different than it used to be. It was all cows where now it's dudes. But the land's the same, the willows are the same and the house is about the same, thanks to you and yore father for not changin' it much."

He turned as another horse rode up alongside. The bulky figure of George Lambeau sat easily in the saddle, for all its thickness. He was smoking the inevitable cigar and his face was deeply shadowed by the rim of the sombrero he wore.

"Get back with the guests, Gail," he ordered peremptorily. "After all, it's yore job to entertain them, not to chat with the hands."

Glenning's hands gripped the reins tightly as he bit his lip.

Some day, he told himself, big George Lambeau was going to eat some of the words that he seemed to like to fling out with easy contempt.

WITHOUT speaking, Gail turned her pony's head and rode back to the dudes who were following.

"Listen, Glenning," Lambeau said. "I don't want yuh to get any wrong ideas about yore place here at Bar Two. Yore family might have owned this spread once upon a time, but right now yuh're just a common dude wrangler. Yuh can't expect any special privileges."

"I didn't expect any, Mr. Lambeau," said Glenning, through his teeth. "I didn't know I was takin' any advantage of my havin' owned this place."

"My hands have learned to leave Miss Gail alone," Lambeau grunted. "Seein' it's yore first day here, I'm willin' to overlook some things. But don't let it happen again."

Abruptly the big man swung his horse away from Tom Glenning and followed his stepdaughter back to the dudes. Glenning's eyes blazed as he watched the bulky ranch owner ride away.

"Okay, Mr. Lambeau," he told himself. "I get the idea right away. Yuh're supposed to make me sore enough to go for yuh. Then it would be self-defense, I suppose—if the sheriff ever did hear about it.

Well, I'll play along with the cards I'm holdin'."

He swung down off the paint as he reached the side of the roaring fire. Letting Scoundrel go free, he walked back to take the bits of the dude horses that came out of the moon-splashed night into the ring of firelight.

The more timid dudes wanted someone to hold their horses' heads while they dismounted.

And the most timid of these, Glenning discovered, was a man named Halstead. Glenning decided that Halstead must be a ribbon clerk or something on that order. He was skinny and short and his eyes were masked by a pair of thick-lensed glasses. It was apparent that he disliked horses and feared them.

Just why a man like Halstead had chosen a vacation on a dude ranch was beyond Tom Glenning's imagination.

Halstead, during the ride out to the willows, had squeaked his fear of mountain lions, snakes and wolves. Glenning had heard him complaining querulously about the saddle that had been given him, the horse that had been selected for him, the dampness of the night air. Mr. Halstead, Glenning had decided, was pretty much of a mess.

On the surface, the others seemed to be the usual run of dude ranch guests. There was the couple who seemed out of place away from the glittering night clubs of New York. There was the middle-aged couple who quarreled almost incessantly. There were the girls who had saved their year's salaries for a couple of weeks on a Western ranch. There were the odd men who hoped that a stay on a ranch might bring them a meeting with a wealthy woman. There were the oldsters who liked fishing—and the Dolly Vardens ran big in Cut-throat Creek—and the shadow-eyed celebrities who chose a ranch for a rest cure.

But why, Glenning asked himself, would the guests be so different? And why did they act so little like guests? He had seen Lambeau order them to their horses as though they had been servants, not guests. He had expected some measure of resentment, at least from Halstead, but there had been none.

Glenning hobbled the horses and set them out to graze on the lush grass that grew on the banks of the little creek that flowed through the willows. Scoundrel, he let roam free.

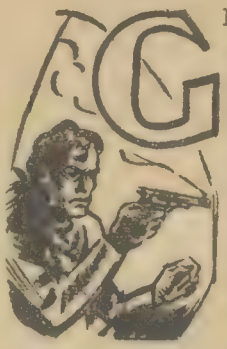
He knew that the paint would not stray and that one low whistle would bring the pony back at a trot.

Monk was squatted beside the fire, preparing the steaks.

"Go ahead, Tom," he said genially. "Tune up the gee-tar and start earnin' yore oats."

## CHAPTER III

### *Prowler in the Dark*



GLENNING found the guitar that Monk had brought out in the buckboard and tuned it, strumming soft chords. Then he began picking out one of the favorite Western songs of the day. He played through one chorus, then began singing. Immediately, the dudes hushed to listen.

Glenning had a clear, strong voice and he played well. Soon, all the dudes were joining in and their voices rose toward the moon in a welling chorus. Later, Glenning played some of the old, little-known ballads of the Old West, songs he had learned as a boy from the men in the bunkhouse. There were sounds of applause when he finished.

"Superb!" chortled a stout woman. "You ought to be on the radio!"

"Uh-huh," grunted Lambeau, from across the fire. "He's a regular movie cowboy, all right."

The little man with the thick glasses, Halstead, moved in between Lambeau and Tom.

"Y'know the one about the baby wolf and the big bison?" he asked.

"Uh-huh," Glenning said. "But the ladies—mebbe it's a little too much on the raw side."

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Halstead. "I—I'm sorry. I didn't know, honestly. Somebody in New York told me to ask for that song."

"Some other time, eh?" Glenning asked.

"Shore," said Lambeau, heavily. "Some other time, when our movie cowboy won't be embarrassed. I'm shore nobody else here would be."

"Mr. Lambeau!" Halstead said. His voice crackled. The dancing flames of the fire made the little man's eyeglasses alive with golden shadows.

"Uh—okay," Lambeau growled. "Mebbe I spoke out of turn. I'm sorry. My daughter, Gail, has some old Shoshone belts and she wants to tell yuh the stories on 'em."

He turned away as Tom Glenning moved out of the light of the camp-fire. Beside him, as he walked into the shadows, was the cowboy, Monk.

"Don't mind Lambeau," the bandy-legged man said in a low voice. "That's just the way he is. He's a good-hearted feller but he talks wrong. He likes to make it tough on his hands but he pays as good as yuh can get around here. Keep yore mouth shut and collect yore wages, I always say."

He ambled back to the fire carrying the utensils, while Tom Glenning inhaled deeply of his cigarette and looked up at the stars. They were hanging low tonight, looking down on Bar-2 as they had for untold centuries, as they had the night he had left the ranch. Then he had stood beside the graves of his mother, his father and his grandfather, looking up into the sky in a mute appeal for them all to forgive him for what he had done. Now he was back and he felt that, somewhere, they were watching him, waiting for him to redeem himself in the eyes of the West.

Suddenly Scoundrel nickered softly from the shadows of a near-by clump of cottonwoods. Glenning glanced sharply in the paint's direction. The other horses, hobbled, were on the other side of the fire. He made out Scoundrel's head in silhouette, thrown back and staring in a direction opposite from the crowd around the fire. Noiselessly, Glenning moved over to the pony's side.

"What yuh see, old fellow?" he asked gently.

The pinto blew through his nostrils and tossed his head. Almost as though the horse had spoken to him, Glenning knew that somebody was out there in the dark, somebody who had gone to great pains to make his approach to the fire as noiseless as possible.

Tom Glenning's eyes narrowed. He took a last drag from his cigarette, dropped it and stepped on it.

"Looks like we don't lose any time startin' this job," he said quietly. "You be still now, Scoundrel."

Casually, the tall cowboy turned and strolled back to the fire. A quick check showed him that none of the dudes had separated himself from the group. Lambeau was still where he had been when he had taunted Glenning. Gail moved about among the guests. Monk was busy at the grill.

"Now, that's right strange," Glenning told himself. "None of the boys from the ranch would be creepin' around in the dark. If there was a phone call or somethin', they'd ride right up. I think I'll take a look-see."

HE SLIPPED back into the shadows and made a silent way in a circuitous route that took him around Scoundrel toward a rise that had been the object of the pinto's gaze. Glenning's knowledge of every acre of the Bar-2 stood him in good stead. There was not the slightest crackle of brush, not one loose stone set rolling, as he slipped through the night toward the rise.

At the edge of a small grove of cottonwoods he stopped, crouched, and swept the scene through squinted eyes.

A minute, two minutes, passed and still he waited. Then he tensed as he saw one shadow, blacker than the others, move. There lay the watcher, the prowler, all unknowing that he himself was being watched.

Instinctively, Glenning's hand went to his hip. Then he cursed softly when he realized that no gun hung there. Back in the buckboard was a .30-.30 that had been brought along on the purely theoretical chance that a mountain lion might decide to join the steak roast. But, Glenning realized, he could hardly hope to go back to the wagon, get the gun, and return to this vantage point unnoticed by the crowd at the fire and, in turn, by the man who was watching.

"Looks like a bare-handed job," Glenning murmured to himself. "And it's ten to one that that hombre is packin' a gun."

Cautiously he edged his way around behind the watcher. Silently he crept up on the figure who lurked in the shadows. He was about ten feet from the stranger when he spoke.

"Yuh make a right nice target, mister," he drawled. "Mebbe yuh'd better put yore hands up a little when yuh stand up. This here gun is mighty impatient."

Glenning heard a sibilant hiss of surprise from the man in the shadows, the sound of an angry snake. There was a scrabbling and the man turned to run. Tom Glenning had a brief glimpse of the prowler. He was short, squat, and clad in city clothes. And he discovered, the man could run like a deer.

Glenning gave chase but the race was uneven from the start. The stranger apparently had not been fooled by Glenning's mention of a gun. He did not bother to dodge as he fled and he made straight for the tangle of brush that Tom Glenning's father had named the "Wilderness."

It was a jumble of foliage so thick that none of the Glennings ever had tried to cut it. It had been left undisturbed as a game refuge, a place where hunted creatures could shake off the pursuit of the hardiest dogs and where prairie chickens and quail raised their broods undisturbed.

"Cuss it," Glenning swore. "I'll never find that critter in there at night! If I'd only had a gun!"

He slowed down as he saw the stranger disappear into the fastness of the "Wilderness." Then, reluctantly, he turned back toward the fire and the dudes who were clamoring for more songs. He still was breathless when he rejoined the circle around the embers and picked up the guitar.

"Where've yuh been, Glenning?" rapped out Lambeau. "The folks have been callin' for yuh a half hour, or more."

"I—I was takin' a walk," Glenning explained lamely. "Must've got mixed up where I was. I didn't know it would take so long to get back. Sorry."

"Yuh're not paid to take walks," Lambeau said with brutal emphasis.

"Oh, now, Lambeau," Halstead protested.

"He's only been gone a couple of minutes. Really, sometimes I think you're too harsh with your men."

"What you think," said Lambeau in even, deadly tones, "don't mean a blasted thing to me."

As Glenning watched, the little man seemed to grow in size. His eyes glinted behind the thick lenses and his chest seemed to swell. He said nothing, but stared straight at Lambeau and, miraculously, the big man seemed to shrink.

"I—I'm sorry, Halstead," he muttered. "Lost my temper. Get on with your song, Glenning."

Tom Glenning bent his head over the strings of the guitar, and plucked out a few chords before he launched into a song. He voiced his words mechanically while his brain used itself for a track for racing thoughts.

Who was the man who had spied on the camp-fire. Were these dudes who sat around the blaze, eating steaks, as innocent as they seemed? The man who had lain in wait in the shadows, watching, must have been looking for something. He had fled like a frightened antelope when he had been challenged; fled straight for the Wilderness where he knew he would be safe from pursuit.

That meant that the prowler had known the lay-out of the country.

IT SEEMED impossible that any fugitive from justice, any escaped convict, would veer so far off the beaten path as to cross the vast and empty reaches of the Bar-2 spread on his quest for freedom. Of course, the Mexican border lay not far from the ranch, to the south—two hundred miles, roughly—but a man beating his way toward the Rio Grande hardly would choose a route that would make the hunt for food and water a vital, heart-breaking task.

A man raised to the plains could do it, but the prowler Glenning had scared up certainly had not been a Westerner. The stiff straw hat, the city-cut clothes never had been intended for a cowboy who might be beating his way in a direction as far opposite as possible from some long-armed sheriff.

He finished the song and launched into another, a popular melody that soon had all the dudes singing with him. That done, he strummed the guitar strings absently, while Lambeau stalked into the circle around the fire.

"Time to leave, folks," the ranch owner said. "You fellers who are goin' fishin' tomorrer up Cut-throat Creek will have to be up before dawn, if yuh want the real good fishin'. And the ladies must be tired. Monk, you and Glenning clean up here and put out the fire. Glenning, bring in the hosses."

Tom Glenning arose and went to lead in the placid mares and geldings which the Bar-2 supplied its guests. Each horse was a rocking-chair but each one had been well-trained to display a purely burlesqued show of spirit which gave the dudes something to talk about when they returned to the city.

"I had a horse named Ginger," they would tell their awed friends back East. "Ugly brute, he was. They were afraid to let me fork him"—dudes always fastened on such terms of speech—"but I tamed him, after a tussle!"

And Ginger, veteran of a score of dude ranches, actually was so lazy that it was only with an effort that he would switch his tail to dislodge a fly.

## CHAPTER IV

### *"This Is It?"*

WHEN the dudes were mounted and started on their way, Tom Glenning rejoined Monk and helped the cowboy pack the buckboard. He was carrying the weighty grill toward the wagon when he heard the "plop" of horse's hoofs in the moist turf behind him and turned to see Gail smiling down from over the saddle, one hand holding in the head-tossing buckskin.

"Thanks, Tom," she said softly. "You did a great job."

Glenning touched his hat.

"Yuh're mighty kind, ma'am," he drawled.

"And," she said, her eyes dancing, "you can forget that Grade-A cowboy accent. You see, I've made your mother's room mine, because she liked the same things I do. Among those things was a framed diploma. Dartmouth, wasn't it?"

"I—" Glenning stopped. Out of the dark came the old mare carrying the acme of all dude ranchers, Mr. Halstead.

"Dartmouth, did I hear you say?" Halstead asked. "I knew people at Dartmouth. Matter of fact, I went up to the Winter Carnival once to ski. Placed fourth in the slalom, matter of fact. Only point our little team made. Well, good night, Glenning."

There was a clatter of hoofs as the two rode off behind the main party jogging toward the ranchhouse. Tom Glenning watched Gail in the saddle, appreciating the lithe swing of her slender body as she followed the gait of her buckskin. When he hoisted the grill into the wagon he found Monk staring down at him.

The cowboy looked around him, to make certain that the others were out of earshot.

"So you're the one they sent," he said.

Glenning bent to pick up a saddle-bag that held the cutlery.

"I'm the man," he said quietly. "What's goin' on?"

"Yuh're really Glenning?" Monk asked.

"Shore." Glenning dropped easily back into his drawl. It was just as well he keep in practice. "They detailed me for this job because I knew the lay of the land. Found out anything?"

"Only that there's somethin' funny going on," Monk said. "I don't know just what it is. This here is no more of a dude ranch than Grand Central Station is. I reckon yuh found that out already."

"I . . . Yuh're Accord, aren't yuh?"

"I could be," said Monk briefly. "What happened while yuh was away from the fire? What did yuh see?"

TOM GLENNING looked up at the man on the wagon seat.

"See?" he asked. "What makes yuh think I saw somethin'?"

"You saw somethin'," Monk said decisively. "Yuh was out there near yore hoss when I spoke to yuh, just after Lambeau popped off. Then yuh come back to the fire and looked around. It looked to me like yuh was checkin' up, seein' who was missin', and then yuh disappeared again."

"So?" asked Glenning quietly.

"So when yuh come back to the fire the next time, yuh was out of breath, like yuh'd been runnin'. What did yuh see?"

Glenning snapped a match on his thumbnail and held it to Monk's cigarette. He cupped his hands around the tiny flame as he brought the light to his own cigarette.

"We could say I thought I saw a mountain lion," he suggested. "We could say I didn't see anything because I didn't want to scare the dudes."

"Uh-huh," Monk said thoughtfully. "And we could say that mebbe yuh saw somethin' else."

"Such as?"

"I dunno," Monk admitted. "I've been on this detail for a month and I ain't seen anything yet. But there's somethin' wrong about this spread. The boys back in the office was right about that. Do yuh know Big Gap?"

"Of course."

"Whatever's goin' on has something to do with Big Gap," Monk continued. "I've been waitin' for yuh to show up, because Watson won't let me out of his sight, hardly. If he ain't watchin' me, it's Lambeau. I think they're both wise. But listen!

"About three weeks ago, two hands they called Walt and Pete went out to drive in a couple of Brahmas that strayed away. They was good kids and I know they wasn't in on this. Just after they left, there came a phone message from Salt Lake that Pete's ma was pretty sick and likely to die. All the boys was away, except me, so Watson sent me out to relieve Pete."

HE HESITATED and looked down at his cigarette.

"I caught up with 'em," he said. "They was over near Big Gap, where I thought they'd be. And when I rode up—when I rode up—"

"Yes?"

"I found Pete and Walt hunkered down behind some boulders," Monk blurted. "They yelled at me and told me to hit the dirt. I didn't need no second invite. I went off that hoss in a hurry and lit runnin'. I picked me a big rock and I asked the other two what was doin'. They told me somebody had been poppin' at 'em with a rifle from the top of Big Gap."

His story rushed on now, as he warmed to his subect.

"I told them they was loco. Who's shootin' at anybody around these parts, I asked 'em. Both Walt and Pete liked to have a drink and I figgered they'd got hold of a bottle somewheres. Just when I was convincin' myself that the two boys was tight, I lifted my head—and somebody took a shot at me from the top of Big Gap. I could hear that rifle bullet singin' lullabies in my ear as it went past."

"What happened?" Tom Glenning asked.

"Nothin' much," Monk explained. "The three of us stayed on our bellies and crawled out of there. Our hosses wasn't hurt, so we made tracks back to the ranch. We told Mr. Lambeau what happened."

"And what did he say?"

"Not much. He kept Walt and Pete in his office with him after I'd got through cussin' the hombre that leveled down at me. When they come out, they wasn't talkin'. Every time I tried to talk to 'em, they shut up solid. Which wasn't like 'em, even a little. They were fellers who liked to gab like anybody else, but after they talked to Lambeau they got taken with an ay-cute spell of dumbness."

"What about the other boys?" Glenning asked. "Wasn't any questions asked?"

"Not a one," Monk said. "They're trained proper. I dunno where Lambeau corraled this bunch, but they're pretty unhealthy."

"What happened to Walt and Pete?" Glenning asked swiftly.

"They turned up missin' one day and Lambeau gave out the word that they'd both joined the Army. Volunteered." Monk gave a short laugh. "That's good," he said. "A couple of days before the shootin', I was kiddin' Walt about not bein' in uniform and he showed me his draft card. He was Four-F. Seems he hurted himself on a barbed-wire fence one time and he wasn't in no condition to be a soldier. He was right

put out about it, too."

"And Pete? Was he Four-F, too?"

"Naw. He told me he had a wife and a couple of kids up Nogales way."

"So both of them—" Tom Glenning left the sentence unfinished.

Monk hunched his shoulders in a shrug. Glenning walked over to the fire and began throwing dirt on the glowing embers. To his surprise, he found his heart thumping madly.

"This is it, all right," he told himself.

He returned to the buckboard and whistled, to bring the paint out of the brush. Glenning swung into the saddle, tested the stirrups. He bounced off the pinto's back as though there had been a hot coal under him. As he jumped to the ground there was a faint ripping noise and the saddle slumped to one side. Monk let out a low whistle.

"They're at it already," he said. "Somebody cut that strap."

Glenning bent beside the nervous pony, examining the separated parts of the all-important strap which had passed under Scoundrel's belly to hold the saddle in place.

"Cut," he announced. "It was cut almost through. It gave way when I tested my foot-holds." He turned to Monk, his eyes afire. "The man that did that," he said, "was no stranger to Scoundrel. It wasn't the man hidin' in the dark, who could crawl up and cut my saddle girth. Scoundrel would've kicked the life out of him. That hoss knew whoever fooled with that saddle, Monk."

The man on the wagon nodded in agreement.

"That means one of the dudes, which ain't likely," he said. "Or Lambeau or me." He paused and added, deliberately, "Or Miss Gail."

TOM GLENNING started and stared up at the cowboy.

"Yuh don't think she—yuh can't imagine that she's mixed up in this, can yuh?" he demanded.

Monk gathered up the reins.

"In this business," he said, "yuh can't trust anybody. You don't trust me. I don't trust you. Somebody cut yore saddle girth, hopin' yuh'd get yore neck broke, or that yore pony would go crazy, like they do sometimes when a saddle slips, and kick the light out of yuh. Lambeau or one of the dudes—or the girl—fixed that. I tried to keep my eye on all of 'em but it was hard, havin' to work with the food. Any one of 'em might have slipped off long enough to give the business to that saddle."

He carefully stubbed his cigarette and placed the butt behind an ear.

"Hitch yore hoss to the tail gate," he said "Throw the saddle in the back of the wagon. Let's be gettin' back."

The buckboard was bumping and lurching over the uneven road and the lights of the ranchhouse were bright stars, low on the horizon, when they came up over the hump that topped the willows. Glenning was hunched beside Monk, his eyes drooping, his lean frame racked by fatigue. He had ridden all day and had spent precious hours that should have been used in sleep to preside as a sort of master of ceremonies over this steak roast for the dudes.

A steak roast! Men were fighting and dying all over the world to preserve the principles that they held dear and these people sat around a camp-fire and sang songs and forgot that there were such places as Lidice and Stalingrad and Coventry and Bataan!

Monk—was he trustworthy? They had not told him at headquarters that there was anybody else on this job. Might he not be one of Lambeau's men, detailed to draw out information from him?

And Gail—could she possibly know what was going on at Bar-2? With her clear, direct eyes, could she be part of this gang?

"You awake, Tom?" Monk asked gently.

Glenning started to reply, thought better of it. From his lips came a faint snore. He heard the creak of the hand brake and felt Monk's feet brace on the low dashboard as the cowboy hauled on the reins, pulling up the mules.

"Now we'll see," Monk said, softly. "We'll

[Turn page]

SEEING-BELIEVING
THIRST-RELIEVING
What happens when you look at the circles and move your head from side to side?
ANSWER. The circles spin like a wheel.
PEPSI-COLA
5¢
12 OZ. BOTTLE

see if yuh're the hombre yuh're makin' yoreself out to be."

The cowboy jumped out of the driver's seat, onto the gritty turf. Tom Glenning heard him walk around to the back of the chuckwagon and begin fumbling with the saddle Glenning had thrown there. Scoundrel "whoofed" through his nostrils and danced uneasily.

"Yuh won't find anything there, Monk," Glenning called in a clear voice. "Them saddle pockets haven't got anything more important in 'em than a pack of cigarettes."

Monk straightened. He pushed his hat back on his head and grinned widely.

"Okay," he said. "I just thought I'd have a look. Yuh see—"

"It's all right," Glenning said. "I'd have done the same thing in yore place. Let's get goin'."

The buckboard rattled up the drive between the cottonwoods. Glenning noticed that George Lambeau was on the veranda, the red dot of his cigar spiking the darkness.

"Yuh took yore time," he said sourly, as the wagon drew up beside the porch.

"Tom thought he saw a lion," Monk explained. "And his saddle girth busted."

Lambeau exhaled a thick cloud of smoke. His eyes were blank as he looked at Glenning.

"So?" he asked. "Mebbe we'd better borrer Godfrey's dogs some day this week and have a lion hunt. I don't want 'em killin' my young beef."

"Tom thought he saw a lion up near the Willows," Monk volunteered. "That's what he was doin' when he was away. You know—when the dudes was yellin' for a song."

Lambeau deliberately knocked the ash from his cigar.

"Is that right?" he asked. "Did yuh see a lion up there?"

Glenning laughed and shook his head.

"I thought I saw somethin'," he said, "but it turned out to be a coyote, or maybe a jack. It certainly wasn't no lion."

Out of the shadows strolled the gnarled figure of Watson, the foreman.

"Yuh called me," Mr. Lambeau?" he asked.

"Yes, Watson," said the big man. "Glenning, here, thinks he might have seen a lion up near the willows. Get the boys together at dawn and take out that big pack of Godfrey's dogs. I'll call him right now. If there's a lion loose on the place, I want him killed."

"Yes sir," said the foreman. "I'll take Monk and Slim and Red. I guess Tom, here, could do with a little sleep, seein' he's been on the trail for a while and then had to work tonight."

"I—" Tom Glenning began.

"Nonsense, son," Watson said benevolently. "You stay in yore bunk, boy. We'll get that lion—if there is a lion around here."

## CHAPTER V

### *Border Clearing House*

IT WAS a few minutes after Tom Glenning had turned in that he heard Scoundrel whinny. His eyes opened slowly and he looked about the dark bunkhouse without moving his head. The snores and heavy breathing told him that the men about him were asleep, or were pretending to be.

The paint whinnied again, anxiously. Glenning slipped out from beneath his blankets and, in stockinged feet, made his way to the door. He had his hand on the knob when a voice spoke softly out of the darkness.

"Where yuh goin', boy?" asked Watson, the foreman.

"My hoss is actin' up," Glenning whispered. "He ain't used to a corral. I thought mebbe I'd better look after him. He's still got his hard-road shoes on and if he gets fightin' with one of them geldin's he's liable to cut the throat out of him. I figgered on hobblin' him outside the corral."

"Go ahead," Watson grunted. "Don't make too much noise when yuh come back."

With catlike pace, Tom Glenning slipped out of the bunkhouse, toward the corral. Scoundrel had his nose over the top rail and beside the paint stood a slight figure in some kind of a soft robe.

"Tom!" Gail Lambeau breathed. "I had to talk to you—tell you that you must leave!"

"Leave, ma'am?"

"Yes, at once! There's something going on around here that I don't understand, Tom! Something dreadful! You must leave and—and maybe the Rangers, or the F.B.I. can come in here. There's something about the willows—Big Gap. I know what you saw out there tonight. A little man, or perhaps several little men. They've been around this place almost since the day we took over your ranch. Dad—my stepfather—laughs at me when I tell him I'm afraid. But—but—"

"I don't think you're safe here," Glenning said gravely. "If you can throw a hitch on your horse, I think you'd be smart to ride off with me, if you trusted me."

"But I'm not dressed," the girl faltered. "Of course I trust you, Tom, but . . . Suppose I get some clothes on and—"

"Down!" Glenning whispered sibilantly.

When the girl hesitated, he threw an arm around her and hurled her to the ground. There was somebody standing in the dark-

ness near the wing of the main ranchhouse.

"You can surrender, if you please," came the precise voice of a man. "It would save me the trouble of killing you."

"Mr. Halstead!" Gail said impulsively.

'Yes," Tom Glenning said without emotion. "That's Halstead—or if it isn't, it's one of his cronies You see, ma'am, this dude ranch is just a blind, of course. There isn't a dude in the world who would put up with such an ungracious person as your stepfather as a host—unless he had a reason to be here! I worked a lot of dude ranches before I came here. It was part of my training."

"Training?"

"Yes, Miss Gail. It's strange you didn't wonder why a thick-headed hombre like me wasn't in the Army."

"I did, but—"

"But he's a Government man," cracked the voice from the shadows. "A bungling Government man, I might add. He was spotted the moment he hit here. Also, he blundered upon something at the willows that was unfortunate, for him. Mr. Glenning, do you want to surrender or do you want me to use this so-called tommy-gun on you and the young lady?"

"You'll never get away with it!" Tom Glenning grated. "You haven't a chance to do anything like that and not have the police on your trail."

"Really?" asked Halstead. His voice was faintly amused. "There were two cowboys like you, though not working for the verdammt American Government, who tried to interfere. They tried to find out what was what and—and so, they joined the Army. It was very sudden.

"And if you ride off, who is going to bother tracing you? As for Miss Lambeau, she had a phone call from an aunt in Kansas City. An urgent call. She had to leave in the dead of night and her dear stepfather drove her in to Austin to get the plane. You see?"

TOM GLENNING stood up suddenly, his arms aloft.

"You win," he said quietly. "I must have been crazy to walk into this place, knowing that this ranch was clearing Japs through the Border to that secret submarine base that takes them home."

Halstead moved out of the shadows, the gun held steady on Glenning's middle, his eyeglasses glinting in the moonlight.

"As you say," he observed, "you must have been crazy." He hefted the submachine gun lightly in his hands. "I think we had better walk a while. Out of earshot of the ranchhouse."

Glenning nodded and turned, gathering the trembling girl under his arm.

"Don't cry," he said aloud. "They won't hurt you."

"No?" asked the amused voice behind him. "I'm afraid I can't guarantee that. Although they say that a machine-gun slug in the head doesn't hurt."

"When I tighten my arm, drop flat," Glening whispered to Gail. "Cover your head with your arms and—"

"Stop talking," Halstead rapped. "And keep walking!"

Glenning plodded ahead, head bent, utterly spiritless. But from the corner of his eyes he judged the distance between the gunman who was following the girl and himself and the corral fence where Scoundrel hung his head over the top rail, watching the tableau in bewilderment.

Glenning passed the horse without looking up. He counted to ten, then he lifted his head as he tightened his arm around the girl's shoulders, hurling her earthward. From the tall man's throat came the coughing, snarling cry of a cougar, so natural that Gail, huddled on the ground, shuddered at its nearness.

"Curse you!" growled the man with the gun. "You asked for it. I'll . . . Wait! No! No!"

Glenning looked back over his shoulder to see the man with the tommy-gun, the man who called himself Halstead, back away from them, his face a mask of fear. The spy made a move to lift the submachine gun to his shoulder, then dropped the stubby weapon to turn and run.

He had made only a few feet before Scoundrel was upon him. The pinto, enraged by the fearsome challenge of the mountain cat which Glenning had mimicked had cleared the corral rail. Now, he struck out with both forefeet at the first thing that moved in his path.

Time and again, those steel-shod hoofs struck downward until finally there was the sound of a ripe musk-melon being smashed by a hammer. Then the pony snorted, kicked at the bundle of clothes that had been a man, and trotted over toward Tom Glenning.

"Take Scoundrel," Glenning ordered Gail. "Never mind how you're dressed. This place will be plenty hot in a few minutes. Head for town and call this number when you get there." He pressed a slip of cardboard in the girl's hand. "Hurry up, now!"

She did not hesitate. She vaulted onto the horse, exhibiting a brief glimpse of long white legs. Glenning hit the paint across the rump.

"Bust all your records, Scoundrel," he ordered. "Take the young lady where she wants to go!"

There was the hammer of hoofs as the pinto roared out of the yard, down the lane between the cottonwoods. From the front porch of the ranchhouse came the flash and crash of a gun.

Tom Glenning scurried over to the side

of the trampled spy, picked up the submachine-gun and walked backward toward the grassy hump that had grown around one of the corral stakes. He lowered himself behind the mound and sighted the tommy-gun at the yard before him.

There was yelling inside the ranchhouse and the bunkhouse. The door of the bunkhouse burst open, silhouetting the figures that stood at the threshold. In the van of the pack was Watson, the foreman.

"What the devil—" Watson began.

"Stay where you are, Watson!" Glenning ordered. "I've got a Thompson in my hands. Shut that door and stay inside!"

"Glenning!" the foreman burst out. "I might have known you were a G-man!"

"G-Two man," Glenning corrected. "Stay inside unless you want to get hurt. Your little Jap-running racket is over, Watson."

"Yuh think so?" the man in the doorway sneered. "All we've got to do is get rid of you. The gal on yore hoss already is taken care of. Then we dump yore bodies in the ranchhouse and set it afire. A terrible thing, but there won't be enough left to tell whether yuh burned to death or whatever. And yuh can't get away, Glenning. My boys have got yuh surrounded and the gal is dead."

"Suppose you Nazi-lovin' sons-of-guns come and get me," Tom Glenning said grimly. "And the girl isn't dead."

"She's dead, all right!" came Lambeau's booming voice from behind Tom. "I made shore of that. Little mouse-meat got nipped off that hoss of yores with the first shot. And that pony of yores was killed too, if yuh want to know."

GLENNING'S brain reeled. If Gail and Scoundrel were killed, his position was hopeless.

But there had been only one shot from the porch! It was impossible that one shot could have killed both Gail and Scoundrel. If Gail—and his heart sickened—had been shot, Scoundrel would be able to get through, to somewhere.

Anybody in this region would recognize the pinto and investigate the reason for the paint to gallop through the dawn with a riderless saddle. Or if Scoundrel had been downed, Gail might get to town, to spread the alarm.

Lambeau had said that both the girl and the horse had been killed. If he had said one or the other, Glenning might have believed him. But Lambeau had lied, and that meant that there was a fair chance that both the pinto and the girl had got through.

He laughed as he answered.

"You make words with your mouth, Lambeau," he taunted. "But you lie as much as your boss, Hitler!"

His answer was the flash of a gun and the smack of a slug ricocheting off a rock close to his head. He turned the blunt snout of the tommy-gun in the direction of the flash and poured a stream of bullets into the blackness. There was a mocking laugh from the shadows, another flash, and the eerie whine of a passing hunk of lead.

Glenning heard a shout and turned back in time to deliver a blast at the bunkhouse door, which was spilling men. Most of them were out before he shot, but one dark figure sprawled, tried to get to his knees, but crumpled suddenly. There was the harsh bark of a shotgun, and buckshot splattered the ground about Glenning. He felt a sharp pain in his hunched shoulders and knew that one of the pellets had driven into his back.

He turned the tommy-gun upward and sprayed the second floor windows of the ranchhouse where the "dudes" were crouched, shooting down at him. Somebody tried to zig-zag from the ranchhouse to the bunkhouse and Glenning drew him into sights of the submachine-gun. The gun chattered and the figure leaped and sprawled.

There was the scuff of pebbles beside him and Glenning turned the snout of the gun he held, bringing it to bear fully on the face of Monk as the cowboy squirmed up beside him. "Don't knock me off, mister." Monk grinned. "Looks like yuh could use a little help right now."

"Can you get to a phone?" Glenning asked.

"I tried," Monk said. "Got almost to it when one of them fake dudes jumped me. I had to put him away and by that time the place was too hot."

"What's the set-up?" asked Glenning.

"Not too good, unless the girl gets through," Monk admitted. I guess yuh know by now that them dudes ain't dudes at all. They're workin' for cash—and Hitler. The girl is innocent. Halstead was the head man of the bunch, but Lambeau is in pretty deep. Watson is as bad, and them men of his are lobos.

"I think they've got a couple of hundred Japs holed up in Big Gap—Nips who skipped out of the West Coast before the internment. At least I know there's been a lot of food movin' out of here at night. I guess when Mexico came into the war with us, it sort of spoiled the plans, but they're still shippin' out a few aboard subs." He chuckled. "We may not live to tell the story, but we've busted up the biggest Jap-runnin' outfit in the country."

He wriggled forward a few paces and sighted a long-barrelled, old-fashioned single-action gun. "I grabbed this from over the mantle in the big room," he said. "My own Roscoe is hid in the bunkhouse. I reckon this gun was yore dad's."

"Yes," Tom Glenning said. "That was Dad's."

"This is for yore dad, then," Monk announced grimly.

There was the crashing "whang" of the horse pistol and a screech came from the ranchhouse. Glenning saw somebody reel back from an upstairs window, clutching his stomach. Monk calmly turned the cylinder and drew back the hammer with his thumb.

"A right nice little gun," he said indulgently. "See if I can get another one of them varmints."

There was the crack of a heavy caliber rifle from behind them and Monk lurched forward, the old gun dropping from his nerveless hand. He turned his face toward Glenning, feebly wiping at a thin trickle of blood that oozed from his mouth.

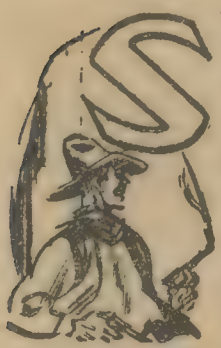
"Bingo," he whispered in a rasping voice. "If that ain't my luck. One shot and I'm through. Some pard of yores, ain't I? But you go get 'em. Even if yuh haven't got a chance of any help comin' in time, keep shootin'! I—I—"

Another shot sounded from behind Glenning and there was the shrill squeal of a slug ripping through the air. The horses in the corral reared and snorted with fear. Glenning carefully laid Monk's body on the ground. "Tell the chief I—I tried," the cowboy said. "It's—"

He grunted and his eyes glazed.

## CHAPTER VI

### *For Devotion to the U. S. A.*



SUDDEN rage flared within Tom Glenning. He picked up the Thompson submachine-gun, labored to his feet and began walking in the direction from which had come the shot that had killed Monk. He walked steadily, in a straight line, the stubby machine-gun held at his hip.

He saw the brief yellow blots that were the blazing muzzles of his enemies' guns, but he did not falter. He kept the tommy-gun at his side, reveling in the jar of the weapon as he blasted back at the fiery splashes that marked the traitors' positions.

There was a blow that spun him off balance and he found himself on the ground, his face pressed against the earth. Faintly he heard a jubilant shout and the sound of running feet as the others converged on him.

There was the jolting jar of a boot in his ribs and he rolled over to look up at Lambeau's face, close to his. The big man fairly spat his venom.

"So yuh didn't think we knew yuh're a Government man!" Lambeau grated. "We did. What yuh think I tried to get yuh into a fight for? I wanted to gouge out yore eyes, break yore arms, make yuh a cripple, make yuh suffer before I handed yuh over to my friends."

Glenning moved his head and saw the flat face of a yellow-skinned man looking past Lambeau's arm.

"You're not choicy about your friends, I see," he murmured. "I thought the only things that would stay that close to a Jap was a sick coyote."

The riding boot caught him under the jaw and there was the sickening confusion of near-unconsciousness.

"Don't insult my friends!" Lambeau was growling. "They pay off for favors I've done them. When this country is under the Axis and the real patriots of France, I'll—"

"Patriots like Pierre Laval, huh?" Glenning asked.

"Yes, and Jacques Doriot and the rest of 'em. Then, I'll have somethin' to say about this country. I'll rule the West and anybody who don't agree with me will find it hard to live."

"Like Walt and Pete?"

"Them two pieces of scum!" Lambeau scoffed. "They stumbled onto something they shouldn't have known. Like that milk-faced stepdaughter of mine. Her mother was a fool, but not as much a fool as she is! Her mother brought with her the money I needed and when she died, Gail wanted to leave but I . . . I don't know why I talk to yuh like this."

"Because," said the yellow-faced man in a hissing voice, "the honorable Mr. Glenning, the so-brilliant Government agent who would pose as a cowboy, will be dead in a very few minutes."

The little man came around Lambeau's arm. He held a slim-barreled Luger in his small hand. His smile was effectionate as he looked down at the man on the ground.

"How fortunate you are," he remarked, "that you were not captured by the Emperor's troops in—say, Malaya. Have you ever had a saw-toothed bayonet pushed in very swiftly and pulled out very slowly, while you lay spread-eagled on the ground? Have you ever had one of our glorious soldiers use bamboo splints under your toenails and your fingernails? Have you ever experienced the water cure? They pour gallons upon gallons of water into your ugly mouth while you lie hunched up with your knees and elbows bound together, so that you cannot swallow nor regurgitate. It is a delightful experiment."

"My side!" Tom Glenning groaned as he rolled over, clutching his right armpit. "It's killing me!"

"It will soon be over, the pain," purred the Japanese. "Your throat will be cut and

then a horse will be led out to stamp on you. Accident is regrettable, but necessary. Excuse, please."

'My side!" Glenning moaned. "For pity's sake, a little water!"

He fumbled at his shirt, gasping, while Lambeau and the Jap crouched over him gloatingly. Tom Glenning rolled again, onto his back.

"I . . . ayeeh!" screamed the Jap. "I did not mean it! I—"

THERE was the thunder of the gun in Tom Glenning's hand, the gun he had plucked from the shoulder holster beneath his shirt. The little Jap took three steps backward, falteringly, and raised his hands to his face. When he took his hands down, the yellow fingers were crimson and what had been a face was now a red mask.

The small man sat down in a ludicrous position, started to raise a hand again to his face. Then he bent over, his face touching his knees, in unconscious obeisance to the forefathers who could not help him now.

Lambeau brought up the heavy gun he was carrying. He had it half-way up before the .38 spoke again. Once—twice. Lambeau sagged in the middle. Suddenly he became a small man, shrivelled and shrunken. The cigar fell from his loose lips as he crumpled. He fell in a lump, kicked one leg spasmodically, then lay still.

Tom Glenning, pain racking his body, threw himself over on his stomach to sight at the nearest enemy. His gun spoke again, but he saw that his fleeing quarry had escaped unharmed. He knew, then, that he had no hope for survival. Lambeau's gang, the "dudes", could surround him and pick him off at leisure.

He hunched himself behind the corral fence post and waited for the final shot to come.

"Worth it," he told himself silently. "I got Lambeau and that Jap, besides that Halstead. Maybe Dad and Mom will know I didn't go down without a fight."

Even as memory of those graves under the cottonwoods, painted by the rising sun, flashed through his mind, there came the shrill cry of a rifle bullet that smashed into the earth a foot from Tom Glenning's head. He raised himself enough to snap back a shot from the .38 in the general direction from which the shot had come.

Immediately, the windows of the bunkhouse blazed with fire. A stone thrown up by a short shot caught Glenning over the eye and he fell sideward, trying vainly to regain his senses. There was a fusillade of gunfire and the ground twitched about him.

"This is it," he told himself. "This is the last curtain."

It was good to go this way, he knew. Others might die in the Far East or on the desert or in roaring bombers hurling destruction down on Germany. But he had been detailed for this job, because he knew the country hereabouts. He had broken up a Jap spy ring and killed its leaders. So if he had to die, this was the way to go. . . .

The first hum of the planes did not penetrate the numbness that had closed down over his brain. When he heard the frantic yells of the men surrounding him, he looked up to see the planes coming in.

They were big, lumbering planes, like sky-flying whales. And from the side of each whale's belly there seemed to be an avalanche of curious objects—tiny black specks which resolved themselves into white mushrooms that slowly drifted toward the ground.

"Parachute troops!" somebody yelled. "Let's get out of here!"

Then there was no more shooting at Tom Glenning and he lay back, gasping, grateful for the surcease. He heard the brief rattle of machine-gun fire near the ranchhouse. Then a youngster appeared above him, barely visible in his wavering gaze. The boy wore a close-fitting helmet and he pointed a blunt automatic rifle at Glenning's middle.

"It's okay, soldier," Glenning said weakly. "I surrender."

With that, he passed out.

* * *

And for excellence in carrying out his appointed mission, the War Department hereby awards to Major Thomas Glenning the Order of the Purple Heart and, by the President's command, the Distinguished Service Cross.

And, for her devotion to the United States and the United Nations; for her excellence in carrying through a message which made possible the capture of enemies of this country and the countries allied with the United States, the President, by executive order . . .

* * *

Gail touched the bright ribbon that hung on her chest. She bent and kissed Tom Glenning lightly.

"I'm awfully proud of you," she said.

"And I'm right proud of you, ma'am," he said, smiling. "I wonder, when I get offen this hospital bed, could yuh give me a job as a hand, ma'am?"

Gail laid her face beside his.

"I reckon I could," she said softly. "I just don't think me and Scoundrel could get along without yuh, Tom." She leaned back and laughed, her voice light and happy, as she said: "Yuh're a right good hand, Tom. When the war's over and yuh come back, mebbe we can make Bar-Two like it was. The best danged ranch in the county, Tom."

"We'll do that," Tom Glenning said quietly. "The best danged ranch in the State."

Coming Next Issue: BANDIT BUSTERS, an Action Novel by W. C. TUTTLE

# SNAKE-BITE JUSTICE

## By BASCOM STURGILL

### *Old Bill Henry Takes the Trail of His Pard's Killer!*

IT WAS a hot, dry land. Not a breath of air had touched its rawhide face in twelve hours. But from where old Bill Henry sat a man might see trail dust lift above the parched mesquite and chaparral thickets for a long way. And if he had patience enough, he might, within a few hours, see a lone rider's sombrero bobbing rhythmically out there.

Bill Henry had patience a-plenty, and he was waiting for the return of that very man. Already his and Sundad's burros were safely staked out in a dense chaparro grove, and a drowsy silence had taken over the little line

Bill Henry

shack where he had found and buried old Sundad only this morning.

It was late afternoon now, and though his keen eyes had not strayed long from their vigil, he had found time to whittle a little wooden cross for his pardner, with his name and the date of his death. For he felt mighty bad about Sundad.

They had never had a lot of words for each other, but when Bill Henry saw his pardner laying dead, staked out spread-eagle in the sun, with stinging ants crawling over his thin body, he remembered a lot of things that he'd wanted to say. So now he talked to old Sundad, just like he would have to Lucifer, his burro.

He told Sundad what a cussed fool he'd been to let him start ahead into town, and how he'd got to worrying about him and followed.

"But I warned yuh about talkin' to anybody, didn't I? And I told yuh that a feller carryin' knowledge of a gold strike had to freeze his tongue—or get in trouble, didn't I?"

Bill Henry knew that old Sundad couldn't hear him from three feet under ground and a pile of rocks, but somehow it eased his soul to talk. It was just as natural as talking to Lucifer, and it helped break the stillness.

Yet in a strange, lonely sort of way Bill Henry reckoned he was at peace with the world. He had done the best he could for poor old soft-hearted, soft-headed Sundad, both alive and dead. For despite his warning old Sundad had actually talked himself to death. And the irony of it was that if he had only talked a little more, disclosed the location of the strike, he might have saved his life.

For the whole story was clear to Bill Henry. Two sets of footprints in the sand, the sign of a short struggle, then horse trail leading off into the south. It was open reading that old Sundad's attacker would return when he felt that the sun torture had loosened the old man's lips. So Bill Henry waited.

HE WAS in no hurry. When it got dark he arose and walked out into the brush a little way and lay down. It was cool now, and he could rest from his hard day. For besides burying old Sundad, he had dug another hole, a deep one like men use to trap wild game. He had placed it so that a man approaching Sundad's mound would either have to jump it, or crowd into the thorny mesquite to by-pass it.

This done, old Bill had captured two big side-winders and dropped them into the pit, stretching a tight tarp across the hole, and making it invisible by sprinkling sand over it. All the surplus earth he had carried away, restoring the place to its original wild dignity.

For Bill Henry knew that Sundad's assailant would find the grave with its rude cross, and that he would walk over to examine it. That moment of curiosity and apprehension would cost him his life, Bill Henry knew. And he was well satisfied.

For a long time he lay looking up at the close panoply of stars, listening to the soft, familiar sounds in the brush, and thinking that there was no better place in the world

for a man to be laid away. It was quiet and peaceful, and he would never be alone, not so long as the wild bulls came a-stalking down through the thickets to water.

And after a bit Bill Henry fell asleep. . . .

When he awoke it was with the suddenness of a cagy old mountain lion, his senses instantly alert. He didn't have to guess what had disturbed him. He knew, because the sound was foreign to the hushed brush noises of the night.

Old Sundad's killer had returned.

Bill Henry got up quickly and without sound, moving like a shadow toward the clearing about the cabin. He wanted to see the man's face when he learned that his victim had vanished. He wanted to observe that instant of sudden fear and doubt when his eyes fell on the grave with its little wooden cross. But most of all, Bill Henry wanted to watch him plunge into the hidden snake pit.

And just as the rider pulled into the open space about the cabin, Bill Henry found a place of seclusion in a clump of huisache from which he could watch unseen.

The man stopped almost upon him, and Bill Henry could see him plainly in the bright moonlight. He was a big man, with close-set eyes and a spread of red whiskers that hid most of his face. Twin guns were tied low down on his levis, and a full saddle-roll indicated that he had returned prepared to travel, that he was sure of success.

But Bill Henry, watching his face, saw everything that he had hoped for—surprise, astonishment, sudden fear. Then he heard a low, savage curse as the man slipped from his big grulla and headed toward the little wooden cross that reared its head against the brush.

Half-way there he stopped, and Bill Henry held his breath. Caution had hit the man sharply. His bushy head spun about like an animal sensing danger, beady little eyes darting here and there for signs of a trap. And Bill Henry could almost hear him listening.

He lost some of the calm assurance that he had maintained all day. He was suddenly afraid that the killer might detect the trap, or that his foot might fall on the rim of the hole in such a way as to warn him in time for him to save himself.

And if that should happen, Bill Henry knew that he would have no means of bringing the man to justice. For only this morning he had used his last shell to kill a rabbit for breakfast, and he wasn't so foolish as to tackle the killer unarmed.

But the ghost of a smile crept up beneath the gray stubble of Bill Henry's face when the man resumed a cautious advance. Inch by inch he followed his movements toward the little wooden cross, saw him leaning forward with a six-gun clutched in nervous hands, and straining to read the inscription that Bill Henry had scrived upon it.

Then—just as Bill Henry had planned it—the killer set one heavy foot squarely into the trap. The next instant he was plunging downward into the darkness of the snake pit.

A loud grunt reached Bill Henry's ears, followed by a brief stunned silence, then furious cursing. The oldster left the huisache clump and headed for his trap. It had sprung upon his prey and he was in no hurry now. He had only to wait for the rattlers to get their job done. He knew that wouldn't be long.

AS HE neared the edge of the pit shots rocketed up from it. Bill Henry continued to smile, because he knew that the man was wasting ammunition down there in the darkness. He could never hit those slithering, rattling objects that twisted about his ankles and lashed out with lightning speed at his legs.

But Bill Henry didn't want him to drive himself mad in his terrorized frenzy, so he approached as near the edge of the pit as he felt was safe and called to him.

"Hey there, feller, stand still and them snakes won't bother yuh! Keep a-chousin' like a stampede and they'll chew yuh up shore as shootin'."

The shooting stopped abruptly, and a pleading voice came up to Bill Henry.

"Throw me down a rope! And for mercy's sake, be quick about it!"

Bill Henry heard the terror in the man's voice, and his toothless smile widened.

"All right, feller," he came back promptly. "You toss up yore guns, then I'll throw down a rope. Reckon that's a fair trade under the circumstances, don't you?"

There followed a brief moment of indecision, then Bill Henry saw one of the guns plunk into the dust at his feet. The other followed immediately, and the man's begging started anew."

"Now throw down that rope! I got to get out of here."

Bill Henry picked up the guns and saw that they had not been emptied. But he didn't seem to be in any hurry. In fact, he appeared to be enjoying the other man's discomfort immensely. He walked over to the edge of the pit and looked down on him.

The big fellow had back up in one corner, and stood as still as a church mouse. From the darkness about his feet came the angry whir of the rattlers. They weren't striking at him now, but his terror had not diminished in the least.

"Reckon yuh know if yuh come up it'll only be to hang for killin' my pardner, don't yuh?" Bill Henry asked. "But I'm goin' to give yuh yore choice. Which'll it be—the snakes or a rope?"

The man turned tortured eyes up to old Bill Henry.

"For mercy's sake, man!" he cried, "I didn't

aim to kill the old gent. I only wanted to make him tell where the gold was. Don't yuh think I've paid enough for that? I've got enough poison in me to kill ten men. Get me out of here and do somethin' for me!"

That was enough for Bill Henry. He knew he had the right man. So he secured one end of a rope to a sturdy mesquite and dropped the other into the pit.

"Yuh can climb out yoreself," he said shortly.

The big redhead came up hand over fist. And when he reached the top Bill Henry was waiting for him, with the fellow's own guns turned against him.

"Do somethin' for me!" the redhead begged. I'll die in an hour if this poison ain't headed off. Yuh can't let a man die like that!"

But the abject terror in his voice had no effect on Bill Henry. Bill was thinking that the shoe was on the other foot now, and that it was pinching a-plenty. But it just wasn't in Bill Henry's make-up to be overly cruel to man or beast.

"I'm goin' to tie yuh up first," he said casually, "so yuh can't try and kill me. Then I aim to finish my nap. After that me and you is headin' for the Hangtown sheriff."

Bill Henry stopped to let this sink in. Then he chuckled and said:

"But just to keep yuh from worryin' all night I'll let yuh in on a good joke. Mebbe yuh can laugh about it, and again mebbe yuh can't. But they wasn't ary speck of poison in them rattlers. I pulled their poison sacks before I dropped 'em in that pit."

*The Arizona Ranger Solves the Mystery of the Golden Queen Mine with Flashing Forty-fives in*

# PASSPORT TO PERDITION

*A Complete Navajo Raine Novelet*

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# THE PONY EXPRESS PAYS OFF

## By REEVE WALKER

*When Desperate, Greed-Maddened Bandits Seek to Pilfer the Means for Carrying on a Great Enterprise, Two Loyal Pards Join Forces to Smash Their Evil Plans for Lawless Loot!*

### CHAPTER I

*Gems and Gold*

ALAMO PAIGE looked Mel Baugh squarely in the eye, told the Pony Express rider he would have to double in brass and drive six hitched to the Carson City stage, and no back talk.

Mel Baugh returned the glance with fight in his light gray eyes, said he was hired to ride fast horses for the Pony Express, and since when did Alamo Paige think he was an equal partner with Russell, Majors, and Waddell?

The two pint-size jockeys stood in the office of the Dayton station, just fifty miles north and east of Carson City. Both were top riders for the Pony Express which carried the mail through mountain storms and desert heat at the rate of five dollars for every half ounce. Neither man knew the meaning of personal fear, and both were intensely loyal to their employers.

Alamo Paige was Mel Baugh's senior in point of service, having signed up with Russell, Majors, and Waddell three days after Alex Carlyle had made the initial run out of old Saint Joe. Baugh had taken the pledge a month later, swearing that he would abstain from the use of intoxicating liquors, would not use profanity, and that he would carry the mail through at the cost of his life, if necessary.

"Yuh swore an oath, Mel," Alamo Paige reminded his companion. "Yuh'll carry certain packets of my mail in a money-belt around yore waist, and under yore buckskin shirt. A hundred thousand dollars worth, but if yuh're afraid, I'll drive the coach and six myself!"

"Yuh will like—like blazes!" Mel Baugh rasped back, and he skinned his little flat-crowned beaver hat from his head. "Now make somethin' out of it, yuh undersized model of a big fightin' man!"

Alamo Paige grinned when he saw that he had won his point. Pony Express riders were picked for their fighting ability, and their small size. Few of them weighed more than a hundred and twenty-five pounds, and their only weapons were the .44 cap-and-ball Dragoon pistol, and the long-bladed issue knife each carried at his belt. That is, aside from the weapons Nature had given them.

"Lay yore hackles, jockey, or I should have said 'reinsman,'" Paige told his partner. "I'd tool the stage myself, but I couldn't drive on the same road with you, and we both know it. The regular driver has been killed, but he saved his cargo of gold. Yuh ready to listen now?"

"Spell it out and count it done, Alamo," Mel Baugh murmured, his loyalty to duty overshadowing his love for fight. "I'm a fair whip on the box, if I do say so as shouldn't."

"I'll say it for yuh," Alamo grunted. "I've seen yuh make a set with the lines many's the time. Checkin' the leaders, less of a tug for the swing team, and slack ribbons for the wheelers. Yuh're an artist with a six-hoss hitch, and it's goin' to take an artist to keep that Concord on the road goin' down the Mother Lode Grade."

MEL BAUGH listened with wonder showing in his puckered gray eyes. He knew that Alamo Paige had not backed water for him, and he also knew that Alamo was stronger than most men far bigger than he was. Rumor had it that Alamo Paige had killed a man for every one of his years, and he had never been known to pick a fight, or walk away from one.

"Go on and tell me, Alamo," Mel Baugh almost pleaded. "The stage-coach carries passengers and the regular mail. The Pony Express covers two hundred and fifty miles a day, and the best stages only make a hundred and twenty-five. Who killed Whip Crocker, and for why?"

"I told yuh," Paige growled. "Road agents tried to stick Whip up for the gold he is

The big outlaw toppled over the cliff and came crashing down like a wounded buzzard

carryin' to Carson City. They might make another try, but we've rigged up a dummy strong-box. Let 'em have it if they make yuh stand and deliver!"

"Yuh mean for me not to put up a fight?" Baugh asked, with incredulity in his hoarse voice. "And yuh still didn't tell me who wants that dust and them nuggets."

"Yuh ever hear of Dude Shuler?" Paige asked quietly, but he grinned wolfishly when Mel Baugh made a little slap at the butt of his pistol.

"Him?" Mel Baugh grunted savagely. "The coldest killer in Nevada, and he wears a rig that's a cross between a gambler's outfit, and mebbe a banker's. He rides with Joe Haley, his right bower, and Mitt Hanlon, his left. There's three of a kind, and a tough combination to beat!"

"But their eyesight will be bad," Paige answered confidentially. "All three of 'em will be dazzled by gold and jewels."

"Come again," Mel Baugh demanded impatiently. "Time's a-wastin', and yuh talk in riddles. Spell it out and quit cloudin' the sign!"

Alamo Paige looked about carefully, flipped the mochila from his left arm, and motioned for Baugh to come close. Then he opened one of the eight pouches in the flat leather mail pouch, took out a packet, and opened it carefully.

Mel Baugh leaned over to look, and his breath came in a hissing gasp. A small handful of unset diamonds glittered up at him, and he sighed his relief when Alamo quickly closed the packet.

"Yuh just looked at a hundred thousand dollars, Mel," Alamo Paige whispered in the hollow voice of awe. "These diamonds represent the private fortune of Alexander Majors, and they also represent the final payment on the stock of the Pony Express!"

"My sainted aunt," Mel Baugh muttered. "I know what yuh mean about Dude Shuler and his gang bein' more or less blinded. But why carry those jools on the stage?"

"On account of Shuler and his boys know I'm carryin' the stuff," Alamo Paige explained. "They made one pass at the stagecoach, and the safest place to hide somethin' is right where nobody would think of lookin' for it."

"Yuh're a dead hombre, Alamo," Mel Baugh said mournfully. "Them three will shoot yuh full of holes and ask questions while they strip yore corpse. Alexander Majors won't like to lose his tophand jockey —not that yuh're any better in the saddle than some others I could name."

Alamo Paige smiled coldly and let it go at that. He had won Mel Baugh over to his point of view, and Mel Baugh was fighting mad. The bigger the responsibility, the harder Baugh would fight, and Baugh could perform magic with a six-horse hitch.

Baugh took the packet of diamonds with trembling hands; big hands that should have belonged to a man twice his size. Alamo Paige guarded the door while Baugh slipped the packet into a skin money-belt which he fastened around his lean waist under his buckskin shirt.

Out in the yard, the station master was giving orders to the wondering hostlers. Six lean thoroughbreds were being harnessed to the high Concord stage, while the blacksmith carefully checked each nut and bolt, and oiled the heavy leather springs.

Old "Whip" Crocker was lying under a tarpaulin in the shade of the barn, but he had lived long enough to bring his cargo of treasure to the safety of the Dayton station of the Pony Express.

He had died ten minutes later, after gasping out his story, and his life, at the same time.

Alamo Paige stared at a lean black stallion waiting at the tie-rail. Alamo knew that when he mounted the speedy stud, he might be starting on his last ride for the Pony Express. He grunted in his throat as he looked to the primings of his Dragoon pistol.

He did not jump when Mel Baugh touched his arm. Baugh wore his buckskin shirt outside his fringed pants, and he carried a long whip in his right hand. He was smiling recklessly with a glitter of anticipation in his gray eyes.

"I start out first and you catch me up just before I reach the mesa above the Mother Lode Grade," he repeated his instructions. "That puts yuh in the mercy seat between a cross-fire. It's been nice workin' with yuh, Alamo, and when yuh get to the big Green Paste'rs over yonder, save me a good place to bed down when I come ridin' along through the clouds."

"Yeah, I'll be seein' yuh," Alamo Paige answered coldly, and the two little men walked out into the dazzling sunshine.

BAUGH climbed on a front hub and mounted to the driver's seat of the Concord stage. His passengers were two drummers from Chicago, and a strong-box rode on the seat at his left. Two hostlers were holding the spooky thoroughbreds, but the horses quieted down some when they felt the strong confident touch of Baugh's hands on the long leather ribbons.

Mel Baugh set his reins to his liking and kicked off the stout brake. The leaders, swing-team, and wheelers all stepped out at the same time as a token of his skill, and when the stage was clear of the yard, Baugh let his reins out a notch.

The six thoroughbreds bolted raggedly for the first two hundred yards, and then settled down like a smooth-working machine. A dust cloud floated up to hide the back

of the stage, and when the rattle of wheels had died away in the high desert air, Alamo Paige walked over to the restive stallion.

He carried the mochilas over an arm, where it fitted like a part of his buckskin clothing. Paige clamped his flat-crowned beaver tightly to his head, bunched the reins on the pommel, and vaulted to the light saddle.

A strange glitter sparkled in his tawny eyes, and then Alamo Paige was all jockey as the big black stallion raced out of the station yard.

The Pony Express was more than an institution to Alamo Paige; it was the very breath of life to the tough little rider. He had helped pioneer the run in the beginning with such men as Bill Cody, Dock Brink, and Pony Bob Hasslem. The final payment would put Russell, Majors and Waddell out of debt, and the Pony Express would be a profitable concern.

With the thought, Alamo Paige nicked the stallion with a blunted spur. He was riding across the desert wasteland with only the dust cloud up ahead for company. The rutted road ran between two high humps of sand and granite where the greasewood and creosote bush grew high on both sides.

Alamo Paige felt the hairs prickle at the back of his neck. He reached for his pouched pistol when a gray hat showed up at the far end of the depression. The hat disappeared at once, and Paige gave the stallion a hand-ride, crouching low across the neck of the racing thoroughbred.

The stallion responded like a winner coming in to the finish line. Then the great horse stumbled and lunged head-over-tail without warning.

PAIGE kicked his moccasins free as he felt the sudden unexpected lunge. He flew clear of the falling horse, ducked his head as he landed hard on his back, and went into a swift tumbling roll. The pistol was jolted from his big right hand, and as Alamo stumbled to his feet, a taunting voice spoke quietly.

"Stand hitched, little man. You're covered front and rear, but we did expect you to break your stubborn neck!"

Alamo Paige turned slowly and raised his head. His slitted tawny eyes made out the dim figure of a tall man standing on the high left bank of the depression. A man dressed in elegant hand-tailored clothing who smiled cynically with dark brown eyes that were almost black. The stranger also held a cocked pistol carelessly in his right hand, with the muzzle covering the heart of Alamo Paige.

"Dude Shuler," Paige said slowly, as he fought to control the dizziness caused by his thudding fall. Then he saw a roughly dressed man on the other knoll behind him.

"And yore right bower, Joe Haley," Paige added bitterly.

"Keno," the bandit agreed. "And for your information, Mitt Hanlon will take care of the jockey up ahead on the Carson City stage." He warned softly, "Keep both those hands high!"

Alamo Paige turned his head to stare at the black stallion. The big horse had made its feet, and aside from some bad skin burns, it seemed sound enough.

Then Paige growled in his throat when he saw a rawhide rope stretched across the gully where it would hit a horse just above the fetlocks.

"So yuh was afraid to fight it out!" Paige taunted "Dude" Shuler. "Yuh carry them hoss-pistols for show, or to shoot a helpless victim in the back?"

Dude Shuler was a handsome man, and he was also prideful. His tweed suit fitted him like a glove, and he wore a knotted cravat over a white linen shirt. A chain of virgin nuggets spanned his fancy brocaded vest, and under the tails of his long coat, Paige could see the holstered mate to the cocked pistol which Shuler held so carelessly in his right hand.

THE boss bandit wore an expensive beaver hat over his dark curly hair which matched his wide-set eyes. He had a well-shaped nose above full red lips which were accentuated by a small black mustache with tapering waxed ends.

It was easy to see how Dude Shuler had come by his name.

The smile fled from Shuler's face as Alamo Paige finished his deliberate insult. The pistol steadied in his long-fingered hand, but Paige threw back his tousled head and laughed aloud.

"Like I said, so press trigger," Alamo taunted again.

Dude Shuler lowered his gun as a slow smile told that he had controlled his anger. He jumped lightly to the gully and picked up the mochilas Paige had lost during his flight.

"I'll settle with you later, my cocky bantam," he said pleasantly. "But I know a way to hurt you worse than giving you your needings here and now. If Alexander Majors can't make his last payment, he's out of business, and his pards with him."

Dude Shuler wasted no time asking Alamo Paige for the key to the lock on the mail pouch.

He slitted the leather with the blade of a bowie knife, searched briefly, then faced Paige with a thunder-cloud on his brow.

"The diamonds!" he burst out. "Where's that packet of jewels?"

"Far away by now," Alamo Paige drawled. "And if yuh touch any of that mail, yuh'll be buckin' the Federal Government!"

## CHAPTER II

### *The Whip*

DUDE SHULER dropped the mail pouch and stared at Alamo Paige with a speculative gleam in his dark eyes. The bandit's left hand went up to his waxed mustache and gently twisted the tapering ends. Then his lips opened in a smile to show even white teeth.

"Search the jockey, Joe," Shuler said quietly to his right bower. "Make him step right out of his buckskins if you don't find the sparklers around his middle."

Alamo Paige felt his heart skip a beat, then it began to pound more rapidly. Could Dude Shuler have known about a money-belt? Alamo twitched when Joe Haley slapped him with both big hands in a thorough search.

"No money-belt on him, Dude," Haley reported. "We got our signals crossed somewheres."

"Skin out of that buckskin shirt and them britches, too," Shuler told Paige coldly. "Look in his hat, and cut his footgear apart if you feel any lumps."

Alamo Paige felt his muscles surge at the suggestion that he strip to the skin. Then he felt the nudge of Joe Haley's pistol, and pulled his soft buckskin shirt off over his tousled head.

Dude Shuler was lumping up Alamo's hat in his hands, and Joe Haley took the buckskin shirt and examined it carefully. The ropy muscles stood out under the skin of the ace rider, and drew a soft whistle of admiration from Dude Shuler.

"Nothing in the shirt but sweat and dirt," Haley reported to his boss, and then prodded Paige with his pistol. "Shuck them britches before I slap you over the skull with my iron and do it for you," he ordered viciously.

Alamo Paige seethed with anger at the indignity, but there was nothing he could do about it. He loosened his belt and stepped out of his fringed buckskin pants, standing in the sunshine in his long cowboy drawers.

"Shed them drawers too," Haley ordered, but Dude Shuler intervened.

"Let be, Haley," he told his segundo. "Leave a man his pride when you can. You, Paige, kick those beaded moccasins loose."

Alamo Paige kicked his moccasins off with a different regard for the handsome Shuler. Alamo would have killed Joe Haley without compunction at the first opportunity, if the bandit had persisted in stripping him to the skin.

"Issue knife," Shuler inventoried, as he turned the blade over in his hand. "Russell, Majors and Waddell stamped on the haft. Tidy little toad-sticker, if we had any toads."

"Nothin' in his britches except a blue bandanna," Haley reported. "And not a blasted thing in his moccasins except a few loose beads. What yuh goin' to do with this jockey, Dude?"

"Take his buckskins and foot-gear and set him afoot," Dude Shuler said carelessly. "It will take him all hours to hoof it to the next station. I'll ride on ahead to see how Mitt Hanlon made out with the stage, and you bring that black stud along when you come."

Dude Shuler climbed out of the wallow and mounted a sleek chestnut gelding. He rode to the west without a backward glance, a tall figure of a man who sat his saddle like a cowboy.

Joe Haley made a bundle of Paige's buckskins, wrapping the moccasins inside the shirt. Alamo Paige measured his chances, then relaxed. There might be a time to fight later, but it was not now. Haley grinned and juggled the Dragoon pistol in his big freckled fist.

"I was wishing yuh'd jump me," he said with a sneer. "Mebbe yuh'll work up yore sand if I tuck my shootin' pistol away." He holstered the gun in his skin scabbard.

With his left hand, Joe Haley drew a big bowie knife with a ten-inch blade. He was an inch taller than six feet, weighed about a hundred and ninety pounds, and his thin lips skinned back to show broken stained teeth.

"Start jumpin'," he invited. "I'm goin' to carve a big P.E. on yore chest, for Pony Express!"

Alamo Paige dug in with his toes as the anger sent the hot blood racing through his tough frame. He was going to make a fight of it, and then he hesitated. A shadow was inching along the ground behind Joe Haley, the shadow of a man with a skinner's whip.

Joe Haley shifted the knife to his right hand and held the blade for an upthrust. He took one forward step, and then liquid fire exploded behind him and bit a chunk of flesh from his knife-hand.

Mel Baugh stood on the high knoll with the whip-stock in his right hand. He was taking his coils with a twist of his supple wrist after that first devastating blow which ripped the bowie knife from Joe Haley's hand.

ALAMO PAIGE made his leap then, jabbing with his left fist. His right crossed neatly to Joe Haley's jaw as the desperado

doubled over, but Haley didn't go down. He rolled with the punch and made a grab at Paige's wrist, but the agile jockey ducked under and up.

The top of his hard skull caught Haley under the chin and jarred the big bandit from teeth to heels. Alamo bent his knees, caught a crotch hold, and flipped Haley to the ground on his back. Then Alamo jumped the bandit and vised down on the corded throat with his big hands locked tight.

Paige closed his eyes and threw the strength of all his muscles into his hands. A madness seized upon him to rob him of reason, and he heard Mel Baugh speak as from a great distance.

"His eyes are buggin', and his tongue is hangin' out a foot, Alamo!" he heard Mel say. "Either turn him loose now, or we'll have to gopher out a hole!"

Alamo Paige loosed his grip and opened his eyes at the same time. Joe Haley was unconscious, and Paige got slowly to his feet. He picked up his pants and shirt and dressed himself, tugging his beaver hat down over his smoldering tawny eyes. Then he slowly raised his head and grinned at Mel Baugh.

"Thanks, reinsman," he said simply. "He was just gettin' fixed to brand me when yuh gave him a taste of the whip."

"I should have let yuh go," Mel Baugh said slowly. "The son had it comin'. Me and my big mouth!"

Alamo Paige's smile widened. He turned his back, caught one of Haley's high-heeled boots between his knees, and tugged the footgear loose. Then he performed the same office for the other foot just as Haley began to stir.

"Take his pants off too," Baugh suggested.

"Never rob a man of his pride when it ain't necessary," Paige said soberly. "That's what Dude Shuler said when this killer meant to strip me down to the hide. We'll set him afoot, and you take his hoss." He looked up at Mel and demanded suddenly: "How in time did you get here nohow?"

"I pulled up in a wallow back aways," Mel Baugh said, with a grin. "The wallow is deep enough to hide the stage, and I knew Shuler and his helpers were up ahead."

"Bad business," Paige said slowly. "That still leaves Shuler up ahead of us to help out Mitt Hanlon."

Mel Baugh mounted Joe Haley's horse and rode out of the depression without speaking, when he caught the look in Alamo's eyes. Baugh knew that Alamo Paige was planning a surprise, and if it would surprise him, it would also give Dude Shuler something new to think about.

On the way back to the stage-coach, Alamo explained how Shuler had searched him for the money-belt containing the diamonds.

"So I'll take the sparklers now," he told Baugh with a grim smile. "You hide yore pistol under the driver's seat to keep from gettin' shot to ribbons."

"I don't aim to stand and deliver," Baugh declared stubbornly.

"Yuh'll stand," Paige contradicted firmly. "Dude Shuler is a dead shot with either hand, and yuh can give them that dummy box of metal we fixed up at the Dayton station. Hand over the belt."

Mel Baugh grumbled, but stripped the money-belt from under his shirt. Looking back on the trail, Alamo could see where the stage had pulled off from the road to enter the deep wallow. Mel Baugh had chosen a spot where there wasn't much grass, but the marks of the iron-shod wheels were plain to a trained tracker.

"Tie Haley's hoss behind the stage," Paige ordered gruffly. "Who in time is that up there on the box, holdin' the ribbons like a pilgrim?"

"Pilgrims come in handy ever so often," Baugh answered with a grin. "That's one of them drummers from Chicago—Martin Leith—and is he mad? He wanted me to give him the loan of my gun so's he could fight the bandits if they tried to stick us up again."

"Better tell him to crawl back into the Concord," Paige advised. "Dude Shuler might take him for a guard, and shoot him down like a clay pigeon. If yuh get held up, tell them two drummers not to try to do any fightin' back."

"Like yuh said, but yuh're goin' to see a long-line skinner do some fightin'," Mel Baugh growled under his breath. Then he rode into the wallow which hid the stage.

Alamo watched while Baugh tied the horse to the luggage holder behind the Concord. He could hear the two traveling men shouting questions at Mel Baugh, and the metallic rattle when Baugh kicked off his brake. Then came the crack of the whip and the jangle of harness as the six thoroughbreds lunged against their collars.

ALAMO PAIGE waited until the stage was once more back on the rutted road. He was still smarting under the indignity of the treatment he had received at the hands of Dude Shuler and Joe Haley. But he felt some better about it when he saw a distant figure limping across the wasteland. That would be Joe Haley, walking without boots.

The stage was hidden by a huge dust cloud of its own making when Alamo Paige lifted the black stallion into a gallop. The brush grew higher as the road wound along the high mesa, and if Mel Baugh could get through Gun-sight Pass, nothing could stop him on the steep Mother Lode Grade which followed the rim of a deep canyon. The Claiborne station was only a mile from the foot

of the grade, but Claiborne was a stage stop, and the Pony Express station was a mile to the west.

Alamo gained on the stage and heard the crack of Mel Baugh's long whip. The six thoroughbreds were running smoothly, guided by a master hand on the long reins. Baugh was going to make a desperate run through the Pass, counting on his speed to carry him through, and he wouldn't make much of a target if Shuler and Hanlon started to trigger their guns.

Alamo Paige shifted his weight and rode well forward, with the mochilas over his brawny arm, and his Dragoon pistol ready in his big right hand. Dude Shuler would not be expecting him to be riding escort for the stage, and if Shuler or Mitt Hanlon saw the solitary horseman, they would think it was Joe Haley coming up to help them.

Alamo checked the stallion a trifle when Mel Baugh's whip stopped popping. Baugh was rolling through Gun-sight Pass, and the stage was slowing down. A splintering crash echoed across the rolling hills, and Paige saw the stage come to an abrupt stop with brakes grinding on the steel-shod wheels.

Alamo Paige fought the spirited black stallion to a stop just as the stage banged against the right side of the Pass and toppled over with a resounding crash. Something had gone wrong, and Alamo Paige rode forward slowly, pistol in his right hand, and smoldering fire in his slitted tawny eyes.

## CHAPTER III

### *Stand and Deliver*

STRANGELY quiet seemed the high desert after the rattle of wheels, and the crash of the overturned stage. The right back wheel was still spinning when Alamo Paige rode cautiously into the pass, crouched over the neck of his horse.

A horse began to struggle and kick farther up in the narrow trail between the steep high walls. A pistol shot rang out as Paige slid from the saddle and tied the stallion to a springy sapling. The overturned stage closed off the pass completely, and Paige was about to crawl under the leather springs of the Concord when a pebble rattled down from the high right bank.

Alamo Paige whirled like a cat, with his Dragoon pistol ready for a shot. A big bearded ruffian was looking down into the pass with a horse pistol clutched in his right hand. A doeskin mitten covered the outlaw's left hand, for "Mitt" Hanlon had been maimed, and he was sensitive about his injury.

Hanlon was leaning over the rocky ledge with his pistol pointing straight down, and a little ahead of the hiding place where Alamo Paige was crouching. Everything about Hanlon was rough and crude, and his face was etched with a terrible cruelty. His lips were parted as he squinted down the barrel of his pistol, and then Alamo Paige saw Martin Leith lying just outside the door of the overturned stage.

The little drummer was holding Mel Baugh's Dragoon pistol with both hands, and the gun roared just as Mitt Hanlon fired from atop the cliff. Leith jerked back with a scream of pain, and Hanlon cursed savagely as he bucked the gun down in his hand for a second shot.

Martin Leith was trying to crawl under the stage, and his left arm dangled at his side. He had dropped the gun, and was moaning softly from the pain of his wound.

Alamo Paige tipped up his pistol and slowly pressed trigger to beat Mitt Hanlon to a murder shot. The gun exploded harmlessly in Hanlon's hand. His knees buckled, and the big outlaw toppled over the cliff and came crashing down like a wounded buzzard that had been shot on the wing.

The heavy body struck the stage and slid up against a broken door. A gun roared from up ahead, and the slug plucked at a wheelspoke just above the wounded drummer's head. Then the thud of racing hoofs echoed through the west end of the pass.

Alamo crawled around Martin Leith with his smoking pistol in his big grimy fist. He caught one fleeting glimpse of a tall man in a tweed coat just dropping over the rise and down the Mother Lode Grade, spurring his chestnut horse into a dead run.

Alamo Paige skinned back his lips as he surveyed the wreckage. A tree had been cut so that it had dropped across the road, blocking Gun-sight Pass. Now Paige knew why Mel Baugh had slammed on his brakes, and why he had heard the splintering crash just before the Concord had overturned.

The leaders had crashed the barrier and had gone down in a tangle of harness. The other four horses were standing quietly because they could not escape. The hickory wagon tongue had splintered near the bed, and the dummy strong-box had tumbled from the high seat.

"Mel!" Paige called softly. "Mel Baugh!"

Panic seized the tough little rider for a moment. Not fear for himself, but Mel Baugh was missing. He wouldn't have had much chance to save himself, and then Alamo remembered that Martin Leith had fired Baugh's gun, evidently at Dude Shuler.

Alamo scrambled under the stage and pulled the little drummer into the clear. The

second man was still in the stage, for a frightened face rose above a window to stare at the tough little Pony Express rider.

Alamo Paige grunted and spoke to Martin Leith.

"Where's the driver?" he asked hoarsely.

Leith bit his lips and pointed with his right hand. One of the lead horses was sprawled against the wall of the narrow pass, and a trickle of blood showed behind one eye.

Paige circled a wheel horse and avoided a kick aimed at him by one of the frightened horses in the swing team. Then he was leaning across the dead leader, and a sigh of relief gusted from his lips when he saw an arm in a buckskin shirt.

"Get me out of here!" a snarling voice shouted, but the sound was muffled.

Paige reached down and lifted the head of the dead horse. Mel Baugh crawled out from under, his weathered face grimy with sweat and dust. His buckskin shirt was ripped open, and he almost forgot the oath he had taken to abstain from profane language.

"Them jools been taken off me," Baugh growled savagely. "Now all I want is one chance at Mitt Hanlon who dropped that tree across the road! I couldn't pull up in time to avoid a crash, and then my lights went out."

ALAMO PAIGE stared at the stage, and measured the distance. Mel Baugh had been thrown at least thirty feet, and he was lucky to be alive. He only grunted when Alamo Paige told him so.

"Just leave me get my hands on that stumpy-handed banditto!" he raged.

Alamo Paige touched Mel Baugh's shoulder, and pointed to the top of the stage. The sprawled form of the big bearded man had dented the roof, and one hand was hanging down by a broken window. A big hand covered by a doeskin mitten.

"Good glory!" Mel Baugh whispered softly, then turned to stare at Alamo Paige. "That's some of yore work," he accused bluntly. "That big son is shot square between the eyes!"

"Yeah," Paige admitted grimly. "Hanlon shot Martin Leith through the arm, and was throwin' down for a follow-up. We better see how bad Leith is hurt."

The little drummer smiled gamely and sat up with his back against the stage. He winced when Alamo Paige cut his left sleeve away with his issue knife, while Mel Baugh helped the other salesman to climb out of the wreckage. Leith winced, then bit down on his lover lip.

"Just a scratch, gentlemen," he said gamely, but his voice trembled. "And that elegant bandit got the gold." He pointed to the strong-box lying in the road with the lock shattered by a bullet.

Alamo Paige laughed grimly. "Wait 'till Dude Shuler opens them canvas sacks," he grunted. "And he could only carry two of 'em."

"Lend a hand here, pilgrim," Mel Baugh told the second drummer. "We'll untangle these hosses and strip the harness. Can yuh ride bareback?"

"No," the frightened salesman whispered. "If it is all the same with you, gentlemen, I will walk to the next station."

"I'll ride," Leith said, shaming his companion. Then he winked at Alamo Paige. "I'm too weak to walk, or you couldn't get me on a horse," he whispered.

"Say!" Mel Baugh exclaimed. "What about Joe Haley's hoss I had tied behind the stage?"

"He broke away," Alamo Paige explained. "Last I saw of that hoss, it was hightailin' across the desert."

Paige went back to his own horse and fumbled in a light saddle-bag. He found a small box which contained some crude first-aid accessories, and returning to the wounded drummer, Paige swabbed the bullet-hole with permanganate, made a tight bandage, and told Martin Leith to try his legs.

Mel Baugh had stripped the harness from the tired horses, leaving only the bridles.

Alamo Paige would have to ride around the narrow Pass and climb one of the high banks. He chose the side from which Mitt Hanlon had made his ambush, and when he rode in from the west, Mel was staring at Hanlon's left hand from which he had pulled the doeskin mitten. Only the little finger remained on the maimed hand, and Baugh quickly replaced the mitten.

"Buckskin Bob Blake did that," Baugh said gruffly to Paige. "Hanlon was aimin' to bushwhack Buckskin Bob with a buffalo gun, but Bob shot first. His slug hit Hanlon where he was holdin' the rifle barrel, and Hanlon has worn that mitten ever since."

"Time's a-wastin'," Alamo Paige interrupted. "Let's help Leith on a hoss, and his pard can suit himself."

The second drummer moaned, and he shuddered when the two jockeys lifted Martin Leith to the back of a tired horse.

"You will help me, gentlemen?" the unhappy salesman pleaded.

Mel Baugh grinned and held a horse by the bridle while Alamo Paige boosted the salesman aboard. Then Baugh vaulted lightly to the other swing horse and rode out,

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leading the remaining animal from the wheel team.

"Don't want to help Joe Haley any," he said to Paige, and then he rode closer. "I hid the real strong-box back in the brush a ways while yuh was bandagin' up Leith's arm."

Paige nodded. He was riding close to the wounded man in case Martin Leith needed any help.

"Dude Shuler is up ahead somewheres," he told Mel. "He'll be in a killin' mood when he finds them iron slugs he carried away from the wreck."

Mel Baugh rode ahead with his led horse, and Alamo Paige followed with Martin Leith. The other drummer brought up the drag, and the procession started down the steep slope of the Mother Lode Grade.

Over the side of the trail and far below in the canyon, a ribbon of silver marked the course of the Rapido River. The sun was lowering in the west, and Alamo Paige watched the trailside brush carefully. The tired horses plodded along the steep grade, and Baugh grunted with relief when they came in sight of the stage station.

"We can leave these pilgrims there and do the work we get paid for doin'," he told Alamo Paige. "I thought shore Dude Shuler would make a try before we reached the bottom!"

"Hands up! Stand and deliver!"

MEL BAUGH stiffened as the old hold-up cry rang out loud and clear. Alamo Paige started for his holstered pistol, but he stopped the move when he saw Dude Shuler watching from the side of the road, with a cocked pistol in each hand. Martin Leith moaned softly and closed his eyes, and the other salesman slid from his horse, unconscious.

"Keep your hands high and dismount," Shuler ordered crisply. "You played a nice trick on me, but not for long. Sometimes lightning does strike twice in the same place, and unless I find those sparklers on you, Alamo Paige, I'm going to kill you. Walk down this way!"

Paige felt the cold sweat pouring down his chest. He was hoping that Mel would hold his temper, and he advanced toward Dude Shuler with both hands held high.

Shuler holstered one gun and reached under his prisoner's buckskin shirt. He removed his hand quickly, took Paige's pistol, and ordered him to unbuckle the money-belt. And as Alamo Paige started to obey, he saw the puckered eyes of Mel Baugh tighten.

Alamo Paige knew that his tough little companion was going to take a desperate chance. He also knew that Dude Shuler was a dead shot, and Paige betrayed the game little jockey to save Mel Baugh's life.

"Don't do it, Mel!" Paige said sharply. "He's got you under his gun!"

## CHAPTER IV

### *More Trouble on the Trail*

MEL BAUGH was a veteran of the long hostile trails over which picked riders carried the Pony Express in good weather and bad. He had won through in many a brush with renegade Indians who resented the intrusion of the white man upon their hunting grounds.

The Indians were smart enough, but the white outlaws, who preyed on the stage lines and Pony Express alike, were more murderous and clever than their red brothers. The lure of easy money and unearned gold was the bait which tempted the bandits who lived and died by the gun.

Baugh had met them all along the flaming frontiers where all men lived dangerously. He had fought many a battle shoulder-to-shoulder with Alamo Paige, and his tough frame bore scars from knives and bullets to remind him of more than one narrow escape from death.

Now he had been betrayed!

He had made a plan, and had timed his attack. His own Dragoon pistol was still in the skin holster on his sturdy right leg. His issue knife was at the back of his belt, out of the way, but easy to his hand. He had told himself that a man couldn't live forever, and Dude Shuler wouldn't have as much to shoot at as the target he offered.

Alamo Paige was watching Baugh, and he could read what was going on behind the jockey's furrowed brow and hot angry eyes. Mel Baugh was mad all the way through, and he felt that he had been robbed of a fighting chance. A chance to save the Pony Express for Russell, Majors, and Waddell, and the diamonds which would have cleared the line of indebtedness.

"Take her easy, pard," Alamo Paige said to Baugh, and barely moved his stiff lips. "There's more trouble on the trail, and Joe Haley has a long gun centered on yore back!"

Mel Baugh expelled the breath from his straining lungs. Dude Shuler smiled sardonically, and with more than a little disappointment mirrored in his dark glittering eyes. Baugh turned his head slowly to verify the truth of Paige's statement.

Sitting his horse not more than fifty yards away, Joe Haley had a rifle to his shoulder, and was squinting down the long barrel. Although Dude Shuler had been playing a sure thing, Joe Haley was coppering the

head man's bet. He lowered the rifle to his hip and rode forward when Shuler jerked his head slightly.

"I was waitin' for yuh to jump, yuh runty bantam," Haley growled at Mel Baugh. "Yuh pulled a sneak on me back yonder with that hoss whip, and I aim to settle the score!"

"I should have let Alamo cut off yore wind entire," Mel Baugh snarled angrily. Then he grinned when he realized that Dude Shuler was in the dark about the fight back in the deep wallow.

Paige was staring at the horse under Joe Haley. It was the same animal Mel Baugh had tied behind the stage, and which had escaped just before the crash in Gun-sight Pass. Haley was riding without boots, and his toes protruded through the holes in his ragged socks.

"Them two lit into me after yuh rode off, Dude," Haley started to explain, but Shuler cut him off with a wave of his left hand.

"Another time, Haley," he said sternly. "Ride over and collect your friend's hardware while I keep him under my gun."

"Better finish yore job first," Haley suggested. "Get them jools, and I'll take care of that runty jockey who thinks he's a whip!"

Alamo Paige acknowledged defeat with a sigh, and with drooping shoulders. He had been stalling for time, and he had lost. He was under two guns, and he stood perfectly still as Dude Shuler removed the money-belt from under his buckskin shirt. He could see the smoldering flame in Mel Baugh's eyes when Shuler tucked the belt in his coat pocket.

"Why didn't yuh jump yore gun, jockey?" Joe Haley taunted Baugh. "Yuh could have died like a hero."

Mel Baugh stiffened and glared at the big outlaw who was riding forward to take his gun and knife. Dude Shuler had lowered his six-shooter, and his left hand was in his pocket with the money-belt.

It all happened so swiftly that even Alamo Paige was not prepared for the violent action which exploded like a bombshell.

Mel Baugh slapped down for his Dragoon pistol, and threw himself forward and down at the same time. The heavy rifle bellowed at Haley's hip, and his horse reared high with fright. Baugh rolled like a cat and snapped a shot at Haley, knocking the big outlaw backward from the saddle.

DUDE SHULER jumped aside when Alamo Paige stepped in front of him. His gun roared sullenly before Baugh could trigger a second shot, and Baugh spilled face-forward as his hat flew from his sandy head.

Paige whirled as the pistol bellowed behind him. His outflung left arm struck Dude Shuler's gun-hand and knocked the smoking pistol from the outlaw's fingers.

Shuler snarled and struck a swift blow with his left fist. Rocky knuckles exploded behind Alamo Paige's right ear and hurled him to the ground. Dude Shuler jumped his horse and roared away through the high brush.

Alamo Paige sat up with a roaring noise in his ears. The light hurt his eyes, and he shook his head to clear away the fog. The blow had dazed him without robbing him of consciousness, and his brain cleared when he heard the distant beat of retreating hoofbeats.

He rolled over and pounced on the gun he had knocked from Shuler's hand. He stretched unsteadily to his feet with the gun ready for a shot, but there was nothing to shoot at. Then he remembered the shot Shuler had triggered at Mel Baugh, and he ran and went to his knees beside the game little rider.

Alamo Paige stared at the blood welling up from a deep gash which furrowed Mel Baugh's scalp. He felt for a heart-beat, and turned Baugh over with a little cry of hope. Dude Shuler's slug had creased Baugh's skull, and a half-inch lower would have found the tough little rider's brain.

Alamo's eyes narrowed as he stared at the black beaver hat which now had two gaping holes in the crown. He growled that men were sleeping all over the place as he glanced at Joe Haley, and the drummer who had fainted. He had forgotten about Martin Leith until the wounded salesman spoke in a weak frightened voice.

"That outlaw shook like a leaf, Alamo. His feet rattled like he had the buck ague."

"His feet rattled, eh?" Alamo Paige repeated with a grim smile. "That means that Joe Haley was shaggin' his way into the Devil's parlor." Alamo took a few steps, turned Haley's body over, and pointed to the sightless, staring eyes. "A dead man always has his eyes open," he stated with a careless shrug. "Mell got the gunny right through the heart."

"This coward who was traveling with me on the stage," Martin Leith said, and pointed to the other salesman with his good hand. "I thought he was scared to death, but his eyes are closed. Wake up, John Collins, you old woman!"

John Collins sat up like a jack-in-the-box, and his eyes popped open. When he saw Joe Haley and Mel Baugh lying motionless, he sighed and fell back again. Martin Leith made a puffing sound with his lips.

"He couldn't stand it," Leith sneered. "Were the diamonds insured?" he asked Alamo Paige.

Paige muttered something to himself and went back to Mel Baugh. He knew nothing about insurance, and he cared less, now that his saddle pard was at death's door

and needed medical attention. Unless Mel Baugh got it quickly, he would be riding through the clouds to the "Big Pasters" where a man bedded down for the last time.

"You stay here with Collins," Paige barked at Leith. "I'm takin' Mel into the stage station, and I'll send out help. Don't leave till somebody gets here!"

"But the dead man!" Leith moaned.

"He won't bother yuh none," Paige answered roughly, and picked Mel Baugh up in his strong arms.

The tired horse made no trouble as Paige laid his wounded pard face-down across the saddle. Then Alamo led the horse across the clearing, mounted the back stallion, and rode slowly across the flat without a backward glance.

Several passengers were waiting for the stage when Alamo Paige rode into the yard where hostlers were waiting with three teams of fresh horses. One man carried a little black satchel, and Alamo headed straight for him.

"Are you a sawbone?" he asked the man bluntly.

"I am," the stranger replied. "I am waiting for the stage to Carson City."

"Yuh've got quite a wait," Paige answered, and swung down from saddle.

He lifted Mel Baugh down easily, laid him in the shade of the station, and told the other passengers to give the wounded man air.

"He got creased across the skull with a bullet, Doc," Paige explained. "Fix him up and send the bill to Russell, Majors, and Waddell, at the Pony Express office in Sacramento."

"Alamo Paige!" a deep rumbling voice boomed from the stage office, and a big bearded man came into the yard. "What's happened to Mel Baugh?"

PAIGE whipped around to face the bearded giant.

"Jock MacTavish!" he said, and shook hands with the stage agent. "Mel Baugh was toolin' yore Carson City stage through Gun-sight Pass when he was held up. Yore regular driver was killed east of Dayton a ways, and Mel took over the ribbons. Better send a crew to clear the pass."—He explained about the crash.

"Except for his size, a better reinsman never drew the breath of life," the big Scot praised Mel Baugh. "The gold, mon. Did the bandits get the bullion?"

"I taken a swear not to cuss," Alamo Paige answered thickly. "Yore precious gold is hid away safe where Mel Baugh put it. It'll have to stay till he rouses around and tells yuh the secret. Now you send out men and a wagon to bring in two of yore passengers, and don't forget the body of Joe Haley—or Mitt Hanlon's, back in the Pass."

"Joe Haley—Mitt Hanlon!" MacTavish almost shouted. "Wurra, wurra! That would mean that Dude Shuler was after our gold. He was here not long since, and he forced one of the hostlers to change his saddle to a fast horse under the point of his gun!"

Alamo Paige stiffened and closed his tawny eyes. His big hands clenched into fists, then his right hand opened and rubbed the smooth butt of Dude Shuler's right-hand gun he had captured. After which Alamo Paige tiptoed over to look down into the face of his unconscious saddle pard.

"Will he get well, Doc?" Alamo whispered huskily.

"He will, but he might lose his memory for a while," the medico answered guardedly. "I'll get him into a bed and dress that scalp wound. When he rouses, he might not have anything worse than a bad headache."

Alamo Paige leaned closer and whispered with his lips close to the doctor's ear.

"When Mel opens his eyes, tell him I said to take it easy. He'll want to know where I went." Paige screwed his eyes up thoughtfully. "Tell him I went to get some medicine."

"Medicine?" the doctor repeated. "You said medicine?"

"Yeah, medicine," Alamo Paige answered with a hard smile twisting his lips. "Some medicine to cure up Alexander Majors' headache. Mel will savvy."

Alamo turned and mounted the tired stallion. The mochila was draped across his arm, and he nudged the black horse into a lope with a moccasin heel. The Pony Express station was just a mile down the road, and Jock MacTavish smiled in his beard as the mellow notes of a bugle drifted back on the late afternoon breeze.

"There goes a mighty mite of a man," the big Scot praised heartily. "I dinna ken what he meant about medicine, but he saved the stage line a fortune in nuggets and dust. He'll be riding gun sign on the trail of Dude Shuler, I'm thinking."

Some further along, Alamo Paige rode into the station yard and threw his mail pouch to the waiting agent. He shouted for the agent to see Jock MacTavish at the stage depot, took the issue knife from the agent's belt, and ran to the tie-rail where a hostler was holding a fresh horse, a long lean thoroughbred built for speed and bottom. Before the bewildered agent could protest, Alamo was racing away into the setting sun.

**Next Issue: BANDIT BUSTERS, by W. C. TUTTLE**

## CHAPTER V

### *Paid in Full*

THE desert was getting sleepy as Alamo Paige pulled his hat low to shade his tawny eyes against the blood-red rays of the setting sun. The bleached bones of buffalo and cattle were tinged with the crimson brush of sunset, as were the cacti which stretched spiny arms upward as though praying for moisture.

Carson City was off to the southwest, a matter of twenty-odd miles. Alamo Paige knew the country as a city dweller knows his own back yard. There was an old seldom used trail through the rugged foot-hills which would cut off five miles, and it branched back to the stage road near a flowing well known as Crystal Springs.

A man saved his horse for a long run, and used speed recklessly where it would better serve his purpose. The Pony Express horses were carefully chosen and trained for the fast ten-mile runs between stations, so now Alamo Paige urged his lean racer to top speed with heel and hand.

He made no pretense of reading sign as he took the short-cut through the badland. Dude Shuler would be drawn to Crystal Springs just as surely as a magnet draws a steel filing. The outlaw would feel secure against pursuit, and confident of his own ability to protect himself should he be overtaken.

Alamo Paige rode with the twilight breeze in his face which was grim and hard, and not too clean. But his wide tawny eyes were watchful, and his hands were steady as he guided his racing mount through the rubble of the wasteland. And in his heart was a purposeful promise to get something which would cure Alexander Majors' headache.

The sun was hovering over the serrated peaks of the high hills when Alamo rode into the grove of tamarinds which surrounded the water-hole at Crystal Springs. He bellied down and drank beside the thoroughbred, then dipped his head and face into the cool water.

Stretching to his feet, Alamo tightened his belt a notch, loosened Dude Shuler's pistol in his skin holster, and led the racer to a deep wallow some little distance away from the water-hole. The shadows were lengthening when he returned to the spring and carefully studied the damp margins.

Some old hoof prints showed here and there, a day old at least. Paige took a tree branch and erased the prints of his own horse, after which he moved back into the shadows of a clump of desert trees. Then he narrowed his eyes and squinted toward the east, and a gentle sigh escaped from his thin grim lips.

A man was riding into the red light of the dying sun. A tall man who sat his horse like a cowboy, with wide shoulders thrown back. An arrogant man with a swagger even in the saddle, and a hundred thousand dollars worth of diamonds in the right-hand pocket of his coat.

As Alamo Paige hugged a tree trunk back in the shadows, Dude Shuler stood up in the stirrups to scan the trail ahead, then hipped around to study the back trail. The bandit reined toward the water-hole and stopped his horse at the margin.

Paige could hear the crackle of dry saddle leather as Dude Shuler swung to the ground. A sucking noise broke the stillness as the weary horse buried its nose in the cool water to slake its thirst.

Alamo Paige peered around the tree and saw Shuler down on his belly. It was always open season on trail wolves, who were free shots for any honest man. Because of Shuler's reputation, many a man would have lined his sights on the unsuspecting outlaw and pressed trigger. But Alamo Paige was a man unto himself.

He waited until Shuler pushed up on his elbows with a deep sigh of content. The horse finished drinking and strayed a pace to the left to graze on the lush grass.

Dude Shuler pushed up to his feet, and his right hand automatically went down to ease his holstered gun against hang. The distance was perhaps twelve paces across the water-hole, and now the light was fading fast.

Alamo Paige stepped out from behind the clump of trees, but Dude Shuler did not see him. He was stretching his cramped muscles when a soft drawling voice came across the water-hole and bit into the outlaw's hearing.

"Reach high, Dude, or suit yoreself!"

Dude Shuler stiffened and turned his head slightly. His dark eyes widened as he saw Alamo Paige facing him across the pool. Paige had his right hand hooked into his belt above his six-shooter.

"I'll reach low," Shuler said quietly. "Did I kill Mel Baugh?"

ALAMO PAIGE felt the sudden surge of anger which made his muscles leap under the skin. Then he smiled without mirth. Dude Shuler knew that anger slows up a man's gun-hand, or makes it shake to spoil his aim. Alamo controlled himself instantly.

"Mel will live," he answered in a low, flat

voice. "But it's different with yore right bower, Joe Haley."

It was Dude Shuler's turn to feel the devastating effects of anger. His dark face twisted with fury, and his eyes began to glow like live coals. Alamo Paige smiled grimly from across the shadowy pool.

"I could have killed yuh then, Dude," Alamo Paige taunted the outlaw. "But I don't need any edge. Lift both hands slow and easy, and I'll give yuh a chance to live. I'll hold yuh for the law, if yuh want any."

"I don't want any," Dude Shuler answered smoothly, and his full red lips parted in a dazzling smile. "Except the kind I always carry in my holster."

"That makes yuh kind of off-handed," Alamo Paige said thoughtfully. "Y u h dropped yore meat gun, and I picked it up. That makes yuh use yore spare in the wrong hand."

"I don't pack a spare," Shuler corrected. "I can shoot as good with either hand."

"Nuh-uh," Paige contradicted. "Or yuh wouldn't have changed that left-handed gun to yore right holster. Better give up!"

Dude Shuler made no answer. He had used up all his talk, and the flesh-pots waited in Carson City. The man didn't live who could beat Dude Shuler to the gun on an even break.

Dude Shuler made his pass!

Like the flicking tongue of a snake, Shuler's right hand ripped down to his holster with his fingers clawed to fit the handle of his gun. The light was almost done, and flame erupted from the killer's hand as his pistol cleared leather.

Alamo Paige saw the sudden surge of muscles which were telegraphed to the outlaw's eyes, to send out a fine spray of wrinkles. Paige stepped swiftly to the right to pull his left side away from the line of fire. The borrowed gun leaped to his hand just as Dude Shuler fired, and Alamo Paige heard the whine of the bullet as it tugged at the fringed edge of his buckskin shirt.

Paige brought up his own gun until the sights met his eye. He squeezed off a slow deliberate shot while Dude Shuler was earing back the bucking gun for a follow-up to his first shot.

Shuler stepped back a pace, and coughed as though acrid powder smoke had irritated his throat. His fingers opened to drop his gun, then he broke at the knees to crash headlong to the marshy margin of the pool.

Alamo Paige lowered his smoking pistol and came around the water-hole. His left hand dipped down into the right hand pocket of Dude Shuler's coat. He removed his hat when the outlaw's boots began to rattle a tattoo of death. Then Alamo Paige replaced his hat, pulled out his buckskin shirt, and fastened the money-belt around his lean hips next to his skin.

A cool breeze whispered down through the foot-hills to announce the coming of night. The hot anger also left the heart of Alamo Paige as his searching fingers found the packet of diamonds secure in the money-belt. Approaching the outlaw's grazing horse slowly, Paige pulled the latigo strap, stripped the riding gear, and turned the weary chestnut loose.

Although he had been in the saddle since daybreak, Alamo Paige felt no weariness. He was conscious of a gnawing hunger as he held his own lean racer to a trot on the ride to Carson City. His thoughts were of Mel Baugh and the plucky rider's narrow escape from death, and if he thought at all about the dangers he himself had experienced, Alamo Paige dismissed them with a careless shrug of his wide shoulders.

Carson City was ablaze with lights when Alamo rode into the thriving town and picked his way through the traffic of freight wagons and ox teams. Men who knew him stared in wonder. Alamo Paige usually raced into town with his bugle blaring and his horse in a dead run, but this time he was not carrying the mail.

Alexander Majors was sitting behind the high desk when Paige entered the station office. Majors was a tall man of aristocratic bearing, but now his head drooped on his white linen shirt, and there was a hopeless stoop to his broad shoulders. His gray eyes were dull when he glanced up, then he leaped to his feet with a cry of welcome.

"Alamo Paige! I'm glad you escaped from that outlaw trap. Forget about the losses!

Alamo Paige stared at his boss as Majors gripped his hand. Tawny eyes bored into the gray ones above him, and then Paige spoke quietly, and with a quality of wonder.

"What losses, Mr. Majors?"

MAJORS stiffened and vised down on the hand within his grasp. Alamo returned the pressure until the big man winced and loosened his grip.

"The diamonds," Majors almost whispered. "As I told you, they represented most of my private fortune. I had made arrangements to convert them into cash, but perhaps I can get a postponement from the bank to save the Pony Express."

Alamo Paige smiled, and the entire expression of his rugged face underwent a change. That smile somehow softened his features, and Majors watched as the Pony Express rider pulled up his buckskin shirt. Strong thick fingers fumbled for a moment with the buckle, pried the tongue loose, and brought out the money-belt. Alamo Paige opened a pocket of the belt, extracted a thick packet,

and handed it to the wide-eyed Majors.

"Here's yore diamonds," Paige said quietly, and now his voice sounded tired. "Yuh won't have to ask for an extension of time."

Alexander Majors opened the packet and closed it again quickly when the yellow light from the coal-oil lamp sent rainbows of leaping color up to the low ceiling. For a moment the two men stared at each other, the tough little Pony Express rider, and the tall aristocratic man who had risked his entire fortune to save the enterprise he had pioneered.

"I won't be forgetting, Alamo," Majors said simply. "Because of your fidelity to duty, the Pony Express can pay off its indebtedness!"

Alamo Paige smiled, then whirled to face the door. From far in the dark distance, the mellow notes of a bugle floated down on the cool night breeze. Then came the thundering hoofs of a racing horse, and a moment later a little rider dashed into the station yard and made a running dismount.

The rider carried a mochila over his arm, and he wore a white bandage around his sandy head. And, stuck down in his belt, was the mate to the pistol Alamo Paige usually carried in the skin holster on his right leg.

"Mel Baugh!" Alamo shouted. "I thought yuh was down on bed-ground with yore head under yuh. The doc said yuh'd be laid up for quite a spell of time!"

"Hush yore fuss," Mel Baugh drawled, with a slow grin. "They wanted me to ride in the stage, but somebody had to carry the mail. All I got was a scratch on the skull, and nobody cut off my head and hid it from me. The mail must go through, eh boss?"

ALEXANDER MAJORS smiled proudly and nodded his head.

"That's right," he agreed, and then his fine face became grave. "And the mail will keep on going through," he said soberly. "Thanks to men like you and Alamo Paige. I heard that you and Alamo had quite a score to settle with Dude Shuler and his gang."

Mel glanced at Alamo and winked. Alamo's hand touched the pistol he had taken from the stiffening fingers of Dude Shuler back at Crystal Springs when he had stopped for a drink. Mel Baugh's eyes lowered to the mate of that pistol, the one Alamo had captured when Dude Shuler had escaped with the diamonds, after the death of Joe Haley.

"That score is paid in full," Alamo Paige told Alexander Majors, and he made no further explanation, except to add: "The Pony Express always pays off!"

FURTHER EXCITING EXPLOITS OF THE PONY EXPRESS RIDER IN

# THE TRIAL OF ALAMO PAIGE

By REEVE WALKER

ONE OF NEXT ISSUE'S ACTION-PACKED NOVELETS

# OUT OF THE HORSE'S MOUTH

By

## ARCHIE JOSCELYN

*A Crooked Deputy Sheriff Almost Gets Away with the Goods, But He Doesn't Know He's Fooling with a Trick Cayuse!*

With a startled look of consternation Maguire grabbed for his gun

FOR a moment, Jud Sanford figured that this was another nightmare, a bad dream of being back under the Big Top, with clowning "Pills" Fagin beginning that long plunge down as the trapeze rope broke. The next instant Jud knew that it was a nightmare all right, but he was wide awake.

"Lift 'em, feller, and don't try reachin' for no gun. I've got yuh dead to rights. This is the Law speakin'."

Jud sat up in his blankets, the long length of him unlimbering slowly, arms raising above his head. Night mists rose clamily from a marshy patch of ground not far off, the chill of dawn was sharp in the air, and crimson streaks in the east made the lightening sky look as if it had suffered from a bad case of blood-poisoning.

Standing twenty feet away was the star-toter, a short, chunky man, quiet but very alert, his heavy .45 keeping a steady bead on Jud. Now he advanced slowly.

"What's this all about?" Jud demanded. "You got the wrong horse by the tail, Sheriff. I'm a stranger hereabouts, just ridin' through the country. Peaceful as a striped pussy that ain't been scared none."

"Yeah?" The sheriff reached down and helped himself to the gun protruding from under Jud's saddle-pillow. That gun had been Pills', back in the old days when they'd ridden the range together, and now that he was heading back for their old stamping grounds, it was about all that Jud had left of the clown—except memories.

"That's right int'restin'," the sheriff said grimly, slipping the gun into a pocket. "And I suppose yuh'll be able to explain how it was that yuh robbed the Sage City Bank last night and murdered the cashier, without being there? You can try tellin' that to he judge. Right now, I'm takin' yuh in for that purpose. And here's a nice pair of bracelets to keep yore hands from gettin' into any more troubles."

Before the steely relentlessnss of the sheriff's eyes, Jud submitted to the handcuffs and stood up.

"I never even heard of the town," he said. "Yuh got me all wrong—"

"Save yore breath," the sheriff said wearily. "Yuh sure answer the desoription of the robber, added to which I've followed a plenty plain trail right to here. My dep'ty, Homer Maguire, is like a foxhound on a hot scent when it comes to followin' a trail.

"Down here a half-mile, he was a little dubious, so he took the fork to the right and I come this way, but he knew what he

was doin' all right, for here yuh are. And there's yore horse, a piebald, just like a dozen people saw yuh ridin'—"

"A piebald?" Jud stared where, during the evening, he had staked out his white cayuse to grass a stone's throw away. What he thought was his horse had just wandered into sight around a clump of chokecherry brush, dragging at the rope. His eyes widened, for this horse was certainly a piebald, one that he had never seen before.

"That ain't my cayuse," he protested. "Mine's a white horse—kind of a circus horse. I—"

"And these ain't yore saddle-bags, I suppose?" the sheriff added, starting to examine the articles in question. He drew out a crimson strip of cloth, held it up to reveal two holes cut in it—eye-holes in a mask. While Jud stared, he delved deeper into the pockets, and pulled out a small roll of bills.

"Here's some of the stolen money," he said. "Kep' this out for expense money, did yuh? Sort of made a mistake in choosin'. I put this same money in the bank yesterday afternoon, myself. Feller paid a fine with it, over at court, and it was all stuck together in his pocket. Easy to tell it. One bill got torn.

"Yep, here it is. Yuh wouldn't want to make it easier for yoreself by tellin' where yuh've hid the other twelve thousand, would yuh?"

JUD shook his head. If Pills had been with him, like in the old days, he'd have been awake as soon as a prowler came snooping, but he, Jud, had slept right through everything. Pills would be ashamed of him.

"I tell yuh I don't know a thing about it, Sheriff," Jud protested. "Somebody's framed me while I slept—"

"And had an easy time, too," the sheriff said sarcastically. "You must sleep like yuh'd already been hung."

It looked like only too clear a case, Jud had to admit as they rode into town. The robber had planted the evidence neatly on him, including a trade in horses and saddle-bags, with the incriminating money and mask in the latter. He was a stranger in the country, and had been out there alone, so he could prove no alibi.

And without one, Sheriff Gardner's words loomed like grim prophecy. A bank had been robbed, the cashier murdered callously, without cause. For that they'd probably hang him.

There was a flurry of excitement when the sheriff brought him in. Feeling was running pretty high in town, evidently. But nothing happened to break the drab monotony of his thoughts until mid-afternoon, when, chancing to glance out of one of his windows—having a corner cell gave him the luxury of two tiny windows—he was electrified to see someone riding up to a hitching post across the street on a white horse.

To the casual eye it was just another white horse, in a community which seemed to run to white horses like a dog to fleas. Jud could count seven other white cayuses along the streets exposed to his view. But he and Pills Fagin and this particular white horse had been partners together too long for him to mistake Artaxerxes when he saw him. Artaxerxes was more than just an ordinary horse.

Jud's interest quickened still more as he caught the gleam of reflected light from a badge on the rider's vest. That would be Homer Maguire, then, the deputy sheriff, and evidently he had followed the trail to good purpose, had found Jud's stolen horse. Things could be expected to happen, now.

But the tall figure of the deputy did not turn across the street toward the jail and the sheriff's office. Instead, he disappeared inside a saloon, probably to wash the dust of travel from his throat, Jud decided. That operation required about ten minutes. But when he reappeared, Maguire still did not come across the street to report to the sheriff. Instead, he sauntered on down it, pausing to speak to several men along the way, and then went into another saloon.

During the next two or three hours, Maguire, without appearing to be so, was a very busy man. From the vantage-point of his corner cell, Jud had a wide view, and he could see every saloon in town—at least eight of them, anyway. Maguire visited each of them in turn, some of them twice, but he had no time to come and report to the sheriff. He seemed to be getting results, however.

Artaxerxes still stood where he had been tied, lost among many other cayuses at hitching rails now. The town was crowded, and it was beginning to boil with excitement. And that excitement seemed to flow strongest in the wake of Homer Maguire.

Jud had seen mobs before, had watched them grow. A clever man needed only to buy drinks, over and over again, to drop a word here and there at the right time, to foment plenty of trouble where none would have sprouted. As he watched the strange behavior of the deputy, and saw its result, grim certainty came to Jud.

It wasn't chance, the deputy riding his horse. None of this was chance. Homer Maguire had robbed that bank and murdered the cashier, then had planted the evidence on him and led the sheriff cleverly to him. But he wasn't content with that. Jud was a stranger, and therefore friendless, but he was likewise an unknown quantity.

The deputy figured cagily that it would be far better if the crowd transformed itself into a mob and did the thing up

neatly and quickly tonight. In open court, Jud might possibly be able to do something about it.

Night was already settling. And as the lights of the town winked on, yellow blobs against the dusk, Jud could see that the small knots of men were starting to gather into larger, more compact groups. It wouldn't be long now.

Finally he heard the sheriff stirring in his little office adjoining the jail. There was a rattle of dishes as someone came in with a tray from the restaurant. Jud turned, and under cover of the noise Gardner was making, he tore a long strip from the old blanket on the cot, and twisted it into the semblance of a rope.

Now the sheriff was coming down the corridor, the tray of supper in one hand, a lantern in the other. Evidently he'd been too busy all afternoon to notice what was going on outside.

Jud reviewed the thing again, fast. Sheriff Tom Gardner, as nearly as he could judge, was a square-shooter. Which didn't help much, right now. The fact that he kept Homer Maguire on as his deputy meant that he had full confidence in the man, and entertained no suspicion as to his real character. To tell what he suspected now wouldn't influence Gardner a bit. It would merely make him more stubborn.

But to stay here and wait for the mob was to die. Gardner would probably try to stop them. And if the deputy showed up, he'd have him help.

But in either case, with Maguire engineering the thing, the result was a foregone conclusion. If they couldn't do it any other way, Maguire would have no hesitancy in creating an "accident" which would make room for a new sheriff—himself. He'd already demonstrated that he knew the uses of murder and treachery.

THE lower half of the cell door was solid, but the upper half was barred, and had a slot for passing dishes through. It was a safe device for the jailer, but Jud had already made his preparations. Now he took the plate, set it down quickly, and drained the heavy cup of coffee almost at a gulp.

"Quite a crowd up the street there," Sheriff," he remarked. And as the sheriff turned to peer out a window, Jud's hands were busy tying one end of his strip of blanket to the handle of the cup.

"Seems to be," Gardner agreed. He stretched and turned to see better, and the act brought him, as Jud had calculated on, within a couple of feet of the cell door, his back to it—safely out of reach ordinarily. Now, with a quick motion, Jud flung the cup—he'd juggled plenty of them back under the Big Top—and it sailed out like the weighted end of a bolas, curving back again to his other waiting hand.

Before the sheriff even realized what was happening, the rope had whipped around his waist, and Jud was jerking him back against the bars of the cell door.

Holding the ends of the rope with one hand, Jud grabbed the sheriff's holstered gun, jamming the muzzle against Gardner's back just in time to stifle his yell for help.

"Be a lot better to keep quiet," Jud warned. "I'd hate to have to hurt yuh, Sheriff, for I know yuh're a well-meanin' guy, but I ain't waitin' here for that mob. Yuh got the keys to this door in yore pocket. Use them."

The sheriff hesitated for a moment, then, before the cold menace of the gun-muzzle, he obeyed. There was something about cold steel that had that effect, Jud knew. Wise men didn't argue with certain death.

"That's fine," he said. "I'll have to ask yuh to wait inside here. It won't be long till they let yuh out."

"If they catch yuh now, they will lynch yuh!" the sheriff warned.

"Wouldn't be surprised if yuh're right," Jud agreed. "But they'll have to catch me first. Yuh heard about the worm that turned, didn't yuh? Well, that's what yuh're seeing now."

Swiftly Jud let himself out of the jail, and none too soon. He had hoped for a little more time, but the mob had finally formed and taken direction, was moving down the street now, hardly a block away. The excited, angry mutter of it was a blood-chilling thing. Another five minutes would have been too late.

He ducked across the street, and swore in pained surprise. His immediate plan had been to get astride Artaxerxes and put distance between himself and the mob. But Artaxerxes was just vanishing like a ghostly shadow, and would have been invisible had he not been a white horse.

Which meant that Homer Maguire didn't intend to be around at the lynching, to be present where his being a deputy sheriff could be embarrassing. With the mob already in motion, left under competent leadership and confident that there would be no hitch in the proceedings, Maguire was leaving—and Jud had a sudden hunch as to where he'd be going now.

What better time could be found for retrieving the bulk of the loot from the bank robbery, which he had probably cached rather hastily the night before, and taking it to some more permanent place for safe-keeping?

That was a break in his favor, and Jud lost no time in taking advantage of it. There were other saddled horses nearby, and he

took the handiest, swung to the saddle and was in pursuit of that ghostly white cayuse, even as a sudden roar of rage and dismay from the jail informed him that his break had already been discovered.

The mob would be taking up a hunt for him in a hurry, and if they found him—well, they'd shoot first and ask questions afterward. But the matter of immediate importance was catching up with that devil of a deputy, without letting him suspect that anything was coming his way until the proper moment.

They were out of town now, heading back in the same general direction from which he had come that morning. Jud was mounted on a brown horse which was practically invisible in the night, but he could see Artaxerxes up ahead without much trouble, while still keeping far enough behind not be heard.

Four or five miles had slipped under the horses' hoofs when Maguire turned abruptly at right angles, in among a grove of big pine trees. Leaving his own horse, Jud followed on foot, and as the rising moon sent a shaft of light among the scattering trees, he saw Artaxerxes standing with dragging reins, busily cropping a few clumps of grass.

Not far off, beside a big tree, was Maguire, in the process of lifting out a loosely folded gunny-sack, which had been thrust out of sight in a hole in the tree.

HAVING brought it to light, the cupidity of the man, cheated for twenty-four hours of viewing the fruits of his big job, triumphed. He paused to open up the sack and lift out a big handful of bills, then he thrust them back and brought his hand up again, clutching now a handful of gold and silver coins.

"Nice work, ain't it, Maguire—if you can get away with it?" Jud asked conversationally.

He saw the startled look in the deputy's face, a consternation so real and sudden that he dropped the sack. Then, swinging, half-grabbing for his gun, Maguire halted the motion as he saw the muzzle of Jud's gun covering him.

"That's being sensible," Jud encouraged. "Raise yore hands out of temptation's way. If yuh don't, I'll sure let moonlight into some of the darker places of yore anatomy, which same could stand some ventilatin'. Fact is, it'd be a pleasure—"

"Drop yore own gun, Sanford! I've got yuh covered!"

Jud very nearly did so, in the sudden shock of that cold voice from off at the side. The voice of Sheriff Tom Gardner, who was stepping forward now, his own gun menacing.

"I didn't stay shut up long, Sanford," Gardner went on. "and I was lucky in chasin' yuh. I see yuh caught him with the goods, Homer."

"Yeah, I sure did," Maguire agreed. "He was aimin' to grab the loot before he lit clean out of the country. But blamed if he didn't go and get the drop on me then."

"He's a bad one," Gardner conceded. "Drop that gun, Sanford. I—"

Somewhere in the distance, Jud could hear the sound of other horsemen. Some of the mob, sent out as a posse. He doubted if any of them had ridden with the sheriff directly, but plenty of them were not far away. Which could easily complicate an already bad situation, and just when it had seemed as if he was beginning to get it under control.

"Listen, Sheriff," he protested hoarsely. "The only way I got the drop on him was by catchin' him red handed. He stole that money, last night, and hid it here. I followed him out from town and saw him uncover it just now!"

"That's too thin a yarn, hombre," Maguire growled. "It ain't goin' to fool nobody. Best thing's to yell for them others," he added, "so they'll know the chase is ended."

He started to open his mouth, but the sheriff checked him.

"Wait!" he snapped. "They're a bit too anxious to lynch him, and I want to ask a few questions first. Why didn't you show up this afternoon? Seems you were in town, and yuh must've known the mob was formin'—"

"He got it up," Jud interjected promptly. "I saw him doin' it. And that's my horse off there, that he traded from me last night.

"Yuh aren't goin' to listen to him, are yuh, Tom?" Maguire demanded. "The yammerin' of a man caught with the goods, against me, yore own deputy?"

"I don't beileve him, Homer, but I want to hear his story," the sheriff said patiently. "Any way yuh can figger to prove what yuh say, feller?"

"That white horse is mine, and I can prove it, all right," Jud agreed. "And you know that it's not the one I rode out here."

"Bosh, that's a horse I've had on the ranch for years," Maguire interjected. But the sheriff nodded at Jud.

"How'd yuh prove it?" he asked.

"He's a circus horse. Knows how to do tricks. If he's yore horse, Maguire, have him set down."

Artaxerxes had raised his head, hearing Jud's voice, had advanced a few steps, head up. Now he whinnied softly. Maguire stared in dismay.

"Circus horse my eye," he growled. "I ain't got no circus horse—but he's my horse!"

"He's admittin' what I say," Jud interterjected. "Sit down, Artaxerxes. Chair!"

At the word, Artaxerxes appeared to nod his head a little. But readily, without hesitation, looking comical as he did so, he sat down almost like a dog, looking from one to the other as if for approval. Maguire looked a little staggered.

"He knows plenty more tricks, Sheriff, as I can demonstrate, to prove he's my horse," Jud went on. "If yuh need any more proof, yuh can ask fifty men of that mob what yore deputy was talkin' up among 'em this afternoon and—"

"Yuh think yuh're smart, but it ain't goin' to help yuh any!" The words were a snarl from Maguire's throat.

While the sheriff's attention wandered for a moment, Maguire had acted, and now his gun was covering the two of them.

"Don't try anythin'," he warned. "Drop yore guns, quick!" And the look in his eyes was warning enough to both of them that he would kill instantly and without compunction if they hesitated.

As their guns thudded on the ground, Maguire stooped, snatching up the gunny-sack, was backing toward Artaxerxes, gun still menacing them.

"Yuh're both too smart for yore own good," he said. "I aimed to be rid of both of yuh, back in town, but yuh spoiled that. Well, I'm goin' to plug yuh both, right now—and time the crowd gets here, it'll sure look right. Look like yuh caught him with the goods, Gardner, and he killed you, then I plugged him in the act. All open an' shut. Mebbe I'll have to give this money back, but the rest of it'll work out."

He had backed up to the horse by then, his gun still menacing the two of them. He reached with one hand for the bridle reins, still clutching the sack in that same hand, fumbling a little, never taking his baleful gaze off his quarry. Then his fingers started to tighten on the trigger.

Artaxerxes had raised his head again. Jud spoke sharply.

"Give him the bum's rush, Artaxerxes!"

The white horse didn't hesitate. One jerk of his head sent the reins swishing back, out of Maguire's grasp. The next moment, before the dumbfounded deputy understood what was happening Artaxerxes had opened his mouth. Maguire was half bent over in the gunman's crouch. The white horse closed his mouth on the ruff of shirt and pants just where they joined, perhaps nipping a little deep and getting a bit of skin as well.

At any rate, things happened fast. Maguire yelled in startled pain and terror, his gun exploded once, the bullet whizzing harmlessly past Jud's ear. He didn't shoot again. Artaxerxes had lifted his head, raising the deputy clear off the ground by the slack of his pants, and, holding him there, he added an innovation of his own to the trick, shaking him as a terrier would a rat.

He was still holding the kicking, squirming Maguire when the first of the posse came spurring on the scene, attracted by the shot. But by that time, grinning broadly, Gardner had control of himself and the situation.

"Reckon that's as thorough and convincin' a demonstration as anyone could ask for, Sanford," he said. "Proof, right out of the horse's mouth! Now, if yuh'll have yore pet let him down a notch or so, I'll put these bracelets where they ought to've been in the first place. And next time, Homer—only of course there won't be no next time—better not go and pick a trick horse to fool with!"

"Tombstone" Jones and "Speedy" Smith Are at Their Entertaining Best in BANDIT BUSTERS, the Featured Complete Novel by W. C. TUTTLE Coming Next Issue—Packed with Thrills and Laughs!

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# Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

## She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

# MAN ON A HORSE

## By HAL WHITE

*Seeking Revenge for an Old Injury, Brent Colehaven Tries to Frame Jimmy Maddern, Forgetting that Sometimes a Trap Will Boomerang!*

IT was a Saturday morning and there wouldn't be much doing in the Yellow Jacket Saloon until later in the day. At the moment, there were no customers, and Brent Colehaven, bartender, was standing outside the batwings, having himself a leisurely cigarette and a spot of June sunshine.

The one long, dust-rutted, false-fronted street of Greasewood Gulch was so quiet, so free of people at this early hour that Colehaven's roving eyes were drawn to the approaching rider while he was still some distance away.

The bartender's lips thinned and his eyes narrowed. The hand he raised to remove the cigarette trembled slightly with sudden tension, and his slim, white-aproned figure was rigid with emotion.

"Maddern." The name came softly from between his teeth, low-spoken but packed with savage hate. "Ride 'em high, feller, while you can. Your string's about played out."

BRENT COLEHAVEN

The tall young bartender flicked ash from the cigarette, and, about to replace it in his mouth, stared at the scar on the back of his hand. Greasewood Gulch knew how he had gotten that scar—and never for a moment did Brent Colehaven forget whose bullet had put it there.

The rider was coming nearer on his big palomino. He wore range garb and a stiff-brimmed Stetson cocked on one side of his head. He rode easily, except that at intervals he let his weight down fully onto his right stirrup and into the saddle, and flexed his left leg.

He did that as he drew near the saloon hitchrack, and Colehaven hid a smile. Maddern didn't know it, but that mannerism, that little trick of lifting his left knee and flexing his leg was going to cost him plenty before Brent Colehaven was through with him.

The bartender turned abruptly and shoved through the batwings. When they flapped again, a minute later, and Maddern came through, Colehaven was behind the bar, busily polishing glasses. A couple of fellows sat at one of the tables, alternately slapping dirty cards on the wood and absent-mindedly waving off several flies which buzzed about their heads in the mellow sunshine. One lone old bar-hound leaned against the bar at the far end, sunk in contemplation of his own affairs. No one else was in the big room.

MADDERN moved down the lane between bar and booths, spurs jingling faintly, high heels silent in the sawdust. When he came opposite Colehaven it was evident that the two men looked much alike. In height, build, coloring, they were surprisingly similar.

But Jimmy Maddern's eyes were clear and honest and direct. Colehaven's, though equally blue, smoldered with a crafty, dangerous light, deep down, and there was smoldering hate in them when he looked at the young rancher.

"Mornin', Brent." Maddern's smile was as friendly as though there had never been that bitter clash between him and Brent Colehaven, down in Texas. Colehaven nodded curtly.

"Shot of red eye," drawled Maddern.

Colehaven shoved out bottle and glass, his right hand showing the scar clearly. As though to say: "Keep it in mind, Maddern. You put that scar on me—and you'll pay for it. Plenty!"

Maddern had two drinks. When he had

gone, with an amiable "s'long, amigo," Colehaven swabbed the spot on the bar where the rancher's glass had stood with cold, hard hatred. He was thinking ahead—planning. And looking back, to that day in Rock Ledge, Texas.

Brent Colehaven and Pete Hostetter had equipped a mighty nice establishment in Rock Ledge. A saloon and gambling hall, with Pete running the saloon and Colehaven handling the tables and pasteboards in a manner that brought large profit without arousing suspicion.

That was until Jimmy Maddern came along, as the new marshal. One day Colehaven, his clever fingers never in better form, was busily engaged in stripping a rich rancher right down to his last pair of levis when Maddern, watching, asked to sit in.

Colehaven couldn't well refuse. After a few moments the marshal had become restless.

"That extra ace up your sleeve, Colehaven," said the marshal quietly. "Just drop it in the spittoon behind you and we'll start over."

"Why, you danged fool!" Colehaven went for his shoulder gun, which was a mistake. His hands with the cards were far faster than the eye, but Maddern shaded even that speed with a gun. Maddern's slug knocked the deadly little double-barreled contraption half way across the room. His second bullet winged Hostetter, who had tried to do a little trap shooting from behind the bar. Colehaven held his own bleeding hand and heard the marshal's curt orders.

"You have until midnight tomorrow—you and Hostetter—to settle your affairs and get out of town. If you're here after that, I'll center my shots. Hear me?"

They heard. They went. But before they went, they dry-gulched Jimmy Maddern, and Colehaven put a mushrooming rifle slug through his left leg. The wound had left a permanent injury. Maddern wasn't lame, but, when he rode, the leg would get to aching and he'd have to relieve the pain by flexing the knee and twisting his foot back and forth. It became so characteristic a gesture that anyone who knew Maddern could spot him a half mile away just by that trick motion of his leg.

Colehaven, washed up as a successful gambler because of the injury to his deft right hand, landed eventually in Greasewood Gulch. Hostetter drifted here and there, at forty and found. When Maddern bought a little ranch near the town and the two men faced each other once more, the hate that had smoldered for two years in Colehaven's soul flamed again, hotly. He wrote a letter to Hostetter.

Dear Pete,—That rat, Maddern, is here. So help me, I'll get that wolf if it's the last thing I do. Me, swabbin' beer slop when you and me could have been making rich dough if it wasn't for him. My hand is no good with the pasteboards, Pete—never will be. Maddern did that. And, mister, he's goin' to pay!

PETE HOSTETTER had had a ranch job for a while near Rock Ledge, and he wrote back that he guessed that old-rifle slug had partly settled the account, 'cause Maddern would never again set a saddle comfortable. But he agreed that it would take more than that to square with Maddern for all the days and nights he'd ridden the grub line with his empty innards callin' him names.

"I'll be seeing you in Greasewood Gulch one of these times," he finished. "When I get there, we'll give that jasper something worse than a bum knee, and then drift, huh?"

But Colehaven, doomed by Jimmy Maddern to a bartender's low wage, wanted two things, and fast! Dinero, and revenge. He couldn't dry-gulch Maddern, because the town knew how he'd garnered that scar on his hand. If the popular young rancher happened to be ambushed they'd come looking for Brent Colehaven—with a rope!

Dinero, and revenge. Colehaven swabbed beer stains and when the idea finally hit him, his eyes glinted with an unholy light. . . .

The Canyon City to Greasewood Gulch stagecoach, carrying ten thousand in gold for the bank in the Gulch, was held up on a bright September morning, early, some five miles out of the Gulch.

The lone holdup man, masked, and riding an unbranded black horse, spoke three curt words from behind a leveled six-gun:

"Toss it off."

Alone on the box, old Bob Hurley stared hard at the bandit, seeking some mark to identify him. He saw none, and, with a resigned sigh, turned to address the two men passengers peering numbly through the opened windows.

"Set tight, gents. Reckon he's runnin' this show." The grizzled driver spat glumly and leaned to unstrap the leather express box. The bandit said nothing, merely shifted his position in the saddle. Hurley caught the motion and straightened, eyes popping.

"Maddern! Well, I'll be danged!"

His words were lost in the blurring roar of six-guns, as the bandit turned his big weapon on the interior of the coach and flame leaped from inside to meet his fire.

The man inside the coach died where he sat. Brent Colehaven died, too, there in the dust of the road, in his plain rancher garb that might have been anybody's. But before he died he had a minute or two to reflect sadly that raising that left knee—like Jimmy Maddern would do—for the benefit of old Bob Hurley hadn't been such a good idea. Not with Pete Hostetter settin' right there and watchin' him do it!

A tawny, catlike animal landed on Lake's shoulders, clawing and biting

# JOB FOR THE BOSS

## By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

*Tom Ward of the Diamond Bar Sets Out to Win a Thousand Dollar Reward—and Gets into a Grand Ruckus!*

IT WAS right warm for early spring and the waddies of the Diamond Bar outfit were feeling proddy. The way Jeff Tyler had been working the outfit during the last two or three weeks sure was a caution. Just seemed like no one could do a job fast enough to suit the Old Man these days.

"A man should be triplets if he aims to do all the work he's suppossed to do on this spread," Tom Ward announced after the Old Man had said a plenty about how slow the waddy had been in digging holes for fence posts over on the north forty. "What's eatin' Tyler anyway?"

"Mebbe he knows you never were any good as a cowhand," Buck Lake commented, and his tone sounded right nasty. "Even triplets wouldn't be much good if they were all like you, Tom Ward."

Those two just stood there glaring at each other. They were both young and husky and were tophands, but they never could get along together. That might have been because Buck Lake had been with the Diamond Bar for close onto six years while Tom Ward was a new member of the outfit. Lake didn't let Ward forget that either.

"Some time I'm goin' to take yuh apart and see what makes yuh tick," Ward said finally. "Always did figger a loud mouth like you ain't made of nothin' but wind."

"Try it," Lake challenged grimly. "Yuh'll likely find yuh've run into a cyclone."

"Stop it, both of yuh!" snapped Ed Norton, foreman of the outfit. "I'm gettin' plumb sick of you two pickin' on each other. Ain't we got enough trouble around here, what with the Old Man growlin' like a wounded grizzly bear, without you two actin' like a couple of buttons spoilin' for a fight."

Ward and Lake didn't say anything. Norton was big and salty and they had learned he wasn't a man to argue with regardless, and still aim to keep your job. All the same Tom Ward knew that he really was getting to hate Buck Lake and it looked like there would have to be a show-down with fists or guns before long.

The argument had started when the outfit was washing up for supper after a hard day's work. The sound of the ranch cook banging on a frying pan to announce it was time to eat was music to their ears. The men didn't take kindly to the way Tom Ward and Buck Lake were always picking on each other, and they figured a good meal might help the dispositions of both waddies.

The eight men in the outfit filed into the cook shack and seated themselves at the long wooden table. Jeff Tyler, who had been a widower for the past ten years, usu-

ally ate with his men. He was seated at the head of the table. He was crowding sixty—a lean, gray-haired old-timer who looked like what he was, a cowman who knew his business from alfalfa to vaccine.

USUALLY Jeff Tyler was a man to ride the river with, but the way he had been acting lately made Tom Ward feel he wouldn't want the old man siding him in wading through a mud-hole. During the last month the boss had become just plain cantankerous.

Trouble was that no one knew just what was bothering the Old Man. He never had been one to tell the world his difficulties, but it was plain to see that there was something wrong. Ward had worked for the outfit for over a year and he was sure the boss would not have changed as he had done without a right good reason.

"You jaspers eat like yuh all figger yuh've done a real day's work," Tyler grumbled when the meal was half over. "And there ain't one of yuh that hasn't been loafin' on the job."

"I've had enough of this!" Buck Lake pushed back his chair and rose from the table, his eyes fixed on the boss. "When yuh run an outfit like it was a pack of mules, and then beef about the men not doin' a day's work—I'm through!"

"Yuh're plumb right yuh're through!" roared Jeff Tyler. "Yuh're fired, Buck Lake—and that goes for any of the rest of yuh who don't like the way I handle this outfit!"

"Aw, Boss," protested Ed Norton, "I reckon Buck don't really want to quit. It's just that yuh've been ridin' us kind of rough-shod lately. We do our jobs—so yuh could ease up a little."

Jeff Tyler just stood there glaring at his men. It looked to Tom Ward as though the boss was about ready to say something important, but the Old Man just turned and left the cook-shack without speaking.

"Wait until mornin' before yuh leave, Buck," the foreman said. "We don't want to lose a good man around here if we can help it! The Boss might cool down by sunup."

"All right," Lake agreed. "I'll stick around till mornin!" He smiled. "Seein' as yuh asked it, Ed."

After supper was over Tom Ward strolled up to the ranchhouse. He found old Jeff Tyler sitting on the porch smoking a pipe in solitude. Ward stopped at the steps. The Old Man just sat smoking and looking at him.

"I'd like to talk to yuh, Boss," Ward said casual-like. "Somethin' personal."

"All right," said Tyler. "Come up and set."

Ward come up the steps and seated himself on the porch rail. He drew out the "makin's" and rolled a quirly. It was a right pretty night with the stars high in the sky and a cool breeze blowing.

"I been thinkin' about my dad," Tom Ward said. "Reckon he would have been about yore age if he had lived."

"What happened to him?" asked the ranch owner.

"Stopped a couple of bullets fired by a sneakin' drygulcher," said Ward. "Dad never believed in tellin' folks when he was in trouble. Which same was a mistake. If he had told me what was worryin' him he might still be alive now. Yuh see, he knew a feller aimed to kill him and if he had told me and let me ride into town with him that mornin' things might have been different."

"A man usually keeps his trouble to hisself," Tyler said. "Why did the drygulcher want to kill yore dad?"

"My dad was a sheriff," said Ward. "A hombre he arrested for rustlin' downed him. I'm shore of that. The rustler was killed later, but that didn't bring my dad back."

The two men smoked in silence for a few minutes. Ward got the impression that someone was standing just beyond the north corner of the porch, but he didn't pay much mind.

"Fifteen years ago me and my brother Lem owned the Diamond Bar," Jeff Tyler said finally. "Lem was a hard man to get along with at times. Touchy as all get-out. We quarreled and he sold his share of the ranch to me and left. I didn't hear anything of him till just about a month ago. Then I learned he'd been huntin' gold for the last fourteen years."

"He ever find any?" asked Tom Ward, as Tyler paused and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"He did—just a year or so ago," said the Old Man. "Lem has a claim back in the mountains about fifty miles south of here. I rode out there to see him about a month ago. He wouldn't have no truck with me at all. Makes me feel bad every time I get to thinkin' about it. My own brother, and the only living relative I've got, refusin' to have anything to do with me."

"So that's what's been makin' yuh so proddy," said Ward.

"That's right." Tyler nodded. "I'd give a thousand dollars if Lem could be talked into comin' back to the ranch as my pardner. Shore would be nice to have him around again."

"A thousand dollars," Ward said slowly. "Yuh really mean that, or yuh just talkin', Boss?"

"I mean it," said Jeff Tyler. "The money is yores or any other man's if they can make Lem Tyler come back to the Diamond Bar as my pardner."

"Then I aim to try and earn that money,"

said Ward. He got to his feet and carefully punched out his cigarette butt. "That is if yuh're willin' to let me take time off to do it."

"Glad to," said Tyler. "Take all the time yuh want, Tom. I been worryin' a lot about Lem lately. Keep thinkin' he might run into trouble. That's why I want him around where I can sort of watch over him. Shucks, Lem is ten years older than I am—and I shore ain't a youngster."

"All right then," Ward said, and went down the porch steps. "I'll see what I can do about gettin' him to the ranch."

AS HE walked toward the bunkhouse Tom Ward got to thinking that he had picked himself a right big job. If old Lem Tyler wouldn't even listen to his brohter, then why should the prospector heed any request a perfect stranger such as Tom Ward might make?

All the same Ward aimed to try and talk Lem into again becoming his brother's pardner. Just how he would go about it he would decide when he reached Lem's claim and talked to him.

Most of the outfit was sleeping when the waddy climbed into his bunk, after removing his boots, hat and gun-belt. He was right tired and it didn't take long for him to fall asleep.

It was still dark when Tom Ward awoke about an hour before dawn. He found the rest of the outfit had left, after getting up even earlier than usual for some reason. Maybe it was more orders the Old Man had given the foreman, Ward decided, as he pulled on his boots.

An oil lamp was burning on the table in the center of the bunkhouse. It was mighty quiet. Ward got to wondering why the other men had let him sleep. That didn't seem quite natural. Unless Tyler had told them that he had a special job for Ward to do today. That might be it.

Ward glanced up as the bunkhouse door swung open and Buck Lake stood there. He was wearing two guns, and there was a mean expression on his face as he glared at Ward.

"They figgered I'd left—quit the job like I told the Old Man last night I was goin' to do," Lake said in a right surly voice. "Ain't a soul here now but just you and me, Ward. The boss and the cook headed out with the boys to start the spring roundup this mornin'."

"Why did you come back?" Ward asked.

He didn't like the way Lake was keeping his hands close to the butts of his guns. He glanced at his own gun-belt and frowned. It was just where he had hung it when he had gone to sleep, but the Colt was now missing from the holster.

"I can use a thousand dollars as well as you can," Lake said coldly. "Mebbe better."

"Oh! Then yuh was listenin' when I was talkin' to the Old Man on the porch last night." Ward picked up the gun-belt and buckled it on. "I thought somebody was there at the end of the porch."

"I was listenin'," said Lake, and right away his guns were in his hands, aimed at Ward. "You ain't goin' after Tyler's brother! Yuh just ain't ever goin' anywhere! I've hated yuh ever since yuh joined this outfit, Ward. Now I aim to do somethin' about it."

"What?" Ward asked bleakly. "Kill me?"

"That's right." Buck Lake nodded. "You ain't as smart as I am. Yuh aim to find Lem Tyler and try to talk him into comin' back here as his brother's pardner—but yuh haven't stopped to think there's a way of gettin' more'n that thousand the Old Man offered."

"By doin' what?" Ward inched closer to Lake. "I don't get what yuh mean."

"By gettin' the gold Lem Tyler must have at his claim," said Lake, as if he didn't care what Tom Ward thought. "I'm gonna tie yuh up and take yuh with me to Tyler's claim. After we get there I'll down the old feller and make it look like he was killed in a gun fight with yuh. I'm smart! I—"

He broke off with a curse. For Ward had leaped forward and caught the wrists that held the two guns. As the two men struggled the guns roared, sending one bullet out the door of the bunkhouse, the other into the wall. Ward reached out with his left foot and kicked over the lamp on the table for darkness might be to his advantage.

The lamp blazed high as the chimney broke, and flames licked at the top of the table. Lake managed to wrench one wrist free. His hand came up and he brought a gun barrel crashing down on Ward's head. Blackness swept over Tom Ward in all-engulfing waves as he lapsed into unconsciousness.

It was hours later when Ward again opened his eyes. At first he thought he was on some sort of a strangely moving boat, and he got to feeling right weak and seasick. Then he discovered he was tied on a horse—a horse that Buck Lake was leading as he rode another mount.

Gradually Ward grew conscious of his surroundings, and found they were heading back into the mountains south of the Diamond Bar range. Lake was carrying out his plan of bringing his prisoner to Lem Tyler's claim.

Ward had been placed in the saddle with his feet in the stirrups and his ankles tied by a rope that ran under the horse. His wrists were fastened in front of him and tied to the saddle-horn. But there was enough slack in the rope fastened to the horn for him to straighten up and sit erect.

"So yuh come out of it," Lake called, as he glanced back and saw his prisoner had regained consciousness. "Well, it don't matter none."

Tom Ward didn't say anything. Didn't seem like there was anything to be gained by cussing Buck Lake a-plenty. They rode on steadily, and as the hours passed Ward got hotter, and more uncomfortable.

THE mountain country grew wilder as the afternoon passed, then it was getting close to sunset. Ward caught a glimpse of a deer, and 'way back in the timber what looked like the bulky figure of a bear. About a mile ahead he spotted a log cabin nestling in among some trees.

"Reckon that's Lem Tyler's Cabin," Lake said.

"How yuh figger that out?" asked Ward derisively. "Yuh shore are smart."

Ward was feeling a heap better. Lake had been too sure of his captive, and Ward had managed to get his wrists free though he was still holding them in front of him as though they were bound. The rope that held his ankles beneath the horse was more of a problem. It would be right hard for him to reach that rope even if no one was watching him.

Lake circled around so that some trees hid the two riders from the view of anyone who might be watching from the cabin. Here Lake halted the horses. He groundhitched his own mount as he swung out of the saddle. Then he walked over to Ward and drew out a jack-knife.

"We're walkin' the rest of the way," Lake said as he cut the ropes that bound Ward's ankles. "The old feller might not welcome visitors."

The instant Ward's ankles were free he kicked his feet from the stirrups and flung himself out of saddle. He landed on Ward and both men hit the ground hard. Surprise was in Ward's favor and he was the first to recover from the fall.

He fought desperately, like a man will when he knows his life is at stake. Lake got no chance to draw his guns as Ward smashed hard blows to his face and body, but he was fighting hard, punching and kicking as the two men rolled around on the ground.

Ward landed a hard blow on Lake's chin that knocked the killer's head back against a small rock. He hit so hard that he was knocked unconscious. On the instant Ward snatched out one of Lake's guns and thrust it into his own empty holster. Then he got to his feet and stood staring down at the unconscious man.

"I shore owed yuh that knockout—after what yuh've done to me," Ward muttered.

Ward drew out Lake's second gun and thrust it in his belt. He left Lake lying there and headed for the cabin. He looked like he had sure been through a lot His shirt had been torn open at the neck, his dark hair was mussed, and he hadn't shaved since yesterday morning. But he walked boldly up to the cabin. There was no need for stealth as far as he was concerned. He wasn't coming there as an enemy.

The cabin door opened and Lem Tyler stood there. Lean, white-haired, with a thick white beard, the prospector looked old but still powerful.

"What yuh want?" Tyler demanded.

"I'm Tom Ward, one of the waddies from yore brother's Diamond Bar outfit," said Ward. "I'd like to talk to yuh about the Old Man."

"Old Man," snorted Tyler. "Shucks, Jeff ain't nothin' but a pig-headed younker. But come in, Ward. Won t do no harm o talk, I reckon."

Tyler moved back from the door and Ward stepped into the cabin. He saw that one of the windows was propped open by a stick. In the distance beyond the window Ward saw a bear standing on its hind legs and even further away was a deer.

"You shore got a lot of wild animals around here," Ward said.

"I get along good with the wild critters," Lem Tyler told him. "Guess yuh could stand a cup of coffee and somethin' to eat. Yuh look like yuh been tanglin' with a buzz-saw."

"Had a little trouble gettin' here," Ward said, right casual-like. "Feller that came with me aimed to kill you and steal yore gold. I didn't like the idea."

"I don't like it either," said Tyler. He took the coffee pot from the stove where it had been boiling and placed it on the table. "Hope you ain't also got any ideas like that, Ward."

"Not any," Ward said, with a smile. "I'm just payin' yuh a friendly visit, that's all."

"Reach high—both of yuh!" came Buck Lake's voice from the doorway. "I want yore gold, Tyler!"

Lake stepped into the cabin a gun in his hand. He was wearing only one of his gun-belts now. And evidently he had had an extra gun in his saddle-bag.

WARD stepped back, seeking a chance to draw his own gun. The old prospector started whistling loudly as he stood behind the table. Lake edged around so his back was toward the open window. Abruptly a tawny, catlike animal leaped in through the window. It landed on Lake's shoulder, clawing and biting as it perched there. Lake uttered a howl of pain and dropped his gun.

"Get this thing off me!" he shouted. "This blasted cat is killin' me!"

"That's enough, Pete." Tyler moved around and lifted the lynx from Lake's bleed-

ing shoulder. "He won't bother us any longer."

The lynx grew quiet as Tyler placed it on the floor of the cabin. It moved about growling nervously, but evidently trusting Lem Tyler to be sure that everything was all right.

"I raised him from the time he was a baby," Tyler said to Tom Ward, with a nod toward the lynx. "Yuh can't usually tame a wildcat, but yuh can make a pet out of a lynx if yuh go about it right."

"He shore was a help to us," Ward said as he covered Lake with his gun. "Reckon yuh better treat this hombre's wounds, and get him fixed up so's we can turn him over to the sheriff. And Lem, Jeff needs yuh as his pardner at the ranch."

"Needs me?" interrupted Lem Tyler. "Then why in tarnation didn't Jeff say that when he was here, instead of tellin' me I just had to come back and be his pardner because he wanted it that way. He always was too bossy. But if he needs me to help him run things right—that's different."

"He needs yuh all right," said Ward. "Like yuh said, he needs an older brother to keep things straight for him at the Diamond Bar."

"All right, I'll come back," Tyler said. "But Pete comes, too. And Jeff will have to let me use the gold I've found to help stock the ranch.

Tom Ward just nodded, but he was feeling mighty good.

It looked as though he had earned a thousand dollars right easy-like.

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ALL PERDITION POPS IN BROKEN BOW WHEN A PAIR OF CRIME-SOLVING RANNIES ARE SWORN IN AS DEPUTIES AND MAKE THINGS HUM

IN

# BANDIT BUSTERS

## By W. C. TUTTLE

NEXT ISSUE'S RIP-SNORTING COMPLETE NOVEL

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# NOT BY A DAM SITE

*A Fighting Ranger Takes Up the Battle of the Diablo Valley Folks When an Evil Genius Conspires to Bring Disaster!*

## By JACKSON COLE

### CHAPTER I

*Death at Diablo*

THE August day was hot, and Diablo City fried like an egg under the Arizona afternoon sun. But it was not insufferable because Diablo Valley lay half-way up the southern slope of the Granite Mountains and there was an occasional vagrant breeze or a stray air current drawn down the natural flue of the valley toward the sunbaked and arid plain country below.

Granite Mountains were somewhat like the base of a tree with gnarled roots partially exposed, numerous valleys, divided by ridges, running up into the mountainous regions. Diablo Valley differed from its neighbors by being deeper and having its lower end almost completely closed off in a bottleneck formation by a pair of rocky ridges which came within fifty yards of meeting. Through this narrow pass flowed the waters of Diablo Creek, to lose themselves somewhere out on the semi-desert country which stretched for miles of rock and sand and cactus north of Phoenix.

It was the peculiarity of the formation of Satan's Gap that was causing plenty of trouble in Diablo City. Matters were boiling up to a head this very afternoon, and only a few men knew what the far-reaching effect would be.

Down the Valley along the dusty trail to town came a grim little procession. A pair of horsemen flanked a springless, flat-bed wagon which contained an ominous-looking bundle in a roll of stained canvas. This was all that was left of Sam Mayfield, Government surveyor, and they'd had to gather him up rather carefully, for a rock slide sort of squashes a man.

The riders were neither cowboys nor natives of this country, as was the bewhiskered old driver of the wagon team. Neither were they tenderfoot pilgrims. Dressed in olive drab, cork helmets, riding breeches and laced boots, they were fellow surveyors of the dead Mayfield, and his death rode hard on them.

Wayne and Masters were both from the East, but they had spent years mapping terrain in the West for Uncle Sam and they were as resourceful and hard-bitten as their breed ever gets. They had no proof, but they knew that Sam Mayfield had not died an accidental death, and they were on their way to report to their superior at Diablo City.

That Theodore Powell would likely blow up, they knew. And they wouldn't blame him. These crazy, sun-dried two-bit ranchers and nesters and townspeople didn't know what was best for them. Suspicious, hateful, actively resentful toward the crew of Government men sent here on a beneficent project, now they had resorted to murder.

Sam Mayfield was the second surveyor to be killed in an "accident." Two weeks ago it had been George Tidwell, a rod man. So Wayne and Masters hated right back and had no sympathy for this valleyful of people who were to be ousted from their homes. If they wanted war they would get it. But let Powell and the Government bring it to them. Wayne and Masters did not want to lose their lives in the meantime.

LITTLE was said as they entered the main street of the settlement and headed for the Pine Tree Hotel at the lower end. The wagon driver, old John Lovington, hostler and general roustabout at the livery barn, had nothing to offer. His eyes were troubled as he glanced at Wayne for instructions.

"Drive on to the hotel," said Wayne in a curt voice. "We've got to show this to Mr. Powell."

Lovington slapped his reins against the backs of his scrawny mustangs and then sharply pulled them up as a man drifted out from the shade of Tilman's Hand-Work Shop and held up his hand. Masters nearly rode into the pedestrian, and pulled up his sweat-

Navajo Raine's hands simply seemed to blur, and he fired once with each gun

ing horse with a curse.

"Get out of the way, you crazy Indian!" he snapped. "Want to be rode down?"

"Wait!" said the man on foot. "What that yuh have there in the wagon?"

"A dead man—if it's any news to you," replied Wayne. "So vamoose."

"Not so fast, please. Who is the dead man?"

"A Government surveyor named Mayfield. Get going, Lovington."

"Where yuh takin' the body," pursued the questioner, inclining his head in a sideward direction. "The undertaker's place is right across the street."

"We have no time to answer an Indian's idle questions. Get out of the road."

"That feller ain't no Injun," observed the wagon driver mildly. "I know Injuns."

Wayne and Masters both surveyed their accoster with greater care. They saw a tall and lithely built man with high cheek-bones and shoulder-length black hair. His clothing was a mixture of cowboy and Navajo garb—a buckskin jacket, fringed breeches, flat-crowned felt hat and cowboy boots. His eyes were black and piercing and his skin was sunburnt to the hue of rich brown. The most significant thing about him was the pair of ornate six-shooters at his flat hips, beautiful but deadly-looking things with silver and turquoise mountings.

"Mex, eh?" observed Wayne in biting irony. "Well, go back to your shade and finish your siesta, Pedro. This is no concern of yours. We are taking this body to the hotel."

"Thank yuh," said the man on foot without rancor, and surprisingly he stepped back out of the way to permit them to proceed.

"Crazy country!" said Wayne half aloud, as they moved on. "Who was that fellow, Lovington?"

"I ain't shore," replied the man on the wagon. "I never see him before. Must have come to town while we was up the Valley."

"If I had been armed," threw in Masters angrily, "he'd never stopped us."

"If yuh'd been totin' a gun yuh'd of been sorry, mister."

"Afraid of a curious Mexican?" snorted the surveyor.

"That feller warn't a Mex, either," said Lovington.

"Then what is he?" asked Wayne. "An Eskimo?"

"I ain't shore," repeated Lovington grimly, "but I reckon yuh'll find out." And he would add nothing further.

Meanwhile the man in question stood there and watched the little cavalcade move on down the stret. His face was expressionless, but his eyes and his lips were hard. Then he turned and walked into Tilman's Hand-Work Shop.

A young man lifted his eyes from the little work-bench where he was polishing a piece of petrified wood preparatory to fitting it in a lady's brooch. Ben Tilman was a former cowboy, and in his twenties. Being unusually clever with his hands, he had quit range work to establish a little shop here in Diablo City where he repaired many things and made a specialty of making trinkets of the jewel-like fragments of prehistoric trees transmuted by Nature into agate, onyx and chalcedony.

All around the shop were bits and sections from the Petrified Forest that Tilman had gathered. They gave a richness of color to the place—Byzantine red, vivid yellows and purples, deep green, white, translucent, or dark pieces with all-color blendings.

"Howdy," he greeted, his friendly gray eyes taking in the turquoise ornaments on the newcomer's hat band, gun butts and criss-crossed belts. "Want to buy a trinket?"

"No, amigo," said the caller, drawing one of his six-shooters and removing the cartridges. "I'd like yuh to fix this gun for me."

"I'm sorry," began Tilman. "I ain't a gunsmith. I don't think I—"

"I didn't mean fix the gun itself. This butt plate is about to lose its turquoise set. I just want yuh to fix the settin'."

"Oh! Shore, I can fix that with a little silver solder. Will yuh leave the gun, Mr.—"

"Raine's the name—Tom Raine. I'll wait."

"Shore," agreed Tilman heartily. "It won't take long. At first I thought yuh was Indian."

"No, but my nickname is Navajo."

Tilman started slightly and almost dropped the gun.

"Navajo Raine!" he exclaimed. "Why, I've heard of you! Yuh're an Arizona Ranger, ain't yuh?"

"Yes," admitted Raine simply.

"What yuh doin' here in Diablo City?" asked Tilman, proceeding with his work deftly.

"I just rode up from down Phoenix way," Raine answered carelessly. "Yuh're the first man I've talked to except for the man at the livery barn where I left my blue roan. He told me his hostler was up the Valley on a special trip."

Tilman's face lost its smile. "Yeah," he said, tight-lipped. "To get a dead man."

"A Government surveyor by the name of Mayfield," added Raine. "The party just passed here."

"I saw 'em," said Tilman shortly.

"Just what's wrong here in Diablo Valley?" asked Raine.

"Who said anything's wrong?"

"That's why I'm here," was the significant answer.

Tilman laid the gun down and straightened his shoulders. He met the Ranger's gaze frankly, and liked what he saw. He had heard considerable about this intrepid lawman.

"NAVAJO" RAINE had been orphaned back in 1887 by the murder of his father, Marshal "Powder" Raine, during the Tonto Basin war. A band of friendly Navajo Indians had rescued the twelve-year-old boy from death by hunger and exposure after Tonto Basin killers had forced him to flee to the mountains, and had then brought the lad up, taking him into the tribe and teaching him their lore of plainscraft and battle.

Later, Navajo Raine had returned to mingle with his own race, a strong and silent and dangerous man to fool with. He had picked up white learning readily and was by way of becoming one of the greatest Western scouts when Captain Burt Mossman prevailed on him to join the Arizona Territorial Rangers. Since that day Navajo Raine had become one of the finest law officers in the entire territory.

And now this man was knocking at the gates of troubled Diablo City. Ben Tilman decided to talk. At least, this man was a native of this country. He would understand what the pig-headed Government surveyors could not or would not comprehend.

"The Governor of the territory and the Government have decided to build a dam here for irrigation purposes," explained Tilman briefly. "That's what them surveyors are doin' roamin' around in the hills."

"What's wrong with that?"

"What's right with it?" burst out Tilman bitterly. "They ain't a thousand people in the whole area to benefit, but to build a dam across Satan's Gap and make a lake of Diablo Valley will force everybody out. Diablo City will be destroyed! All the ranchers and homesteaders will be homeless. Everybody will be ruined."

"Ain't the Government watchin' out for that? Ain't the people bein' paid for their land or given land somewhere else? Ain't they being given money to pay for the expense of movin'?"

"Shore, but what good does that do? Neighbors and friends will be separated. Everything will have to start all over somewheres else. This town will disappear under water, and yuh can't just pick up a town and move it in one chunk to some other place. Yuh better talk to Matthew Colby and see how folks feel about this. The move'll ruin him. He's the Mayor, and everything he owns is invested right here.

"Look at me. I've started a business here. Folks know me. I'll have to go to some strange place and begin all over—or go back to ridin' for a cow outfit. And there's Millie Sanjoy. I'll lose track—" He broke off abruptly.

"Who's Millie Sanjoy?" prompted Navajo Raine sympathetically.

"Chris Sanjoy's daughter. They got a small spread up the Valley on the west slope —the Diamond S."

Raine studied Tilman thoughtfully. It was obvious that Tilman was in love with the daughter of the Diamond S.

"But, Tilman," he suggested gently," can't yuh see that movin' a couple of hundred people out of this Valley will be good for square miles of territory? Mebbe there's not a thousand people here now to profit by this water, but they'll come. There'll be fruit farms and better grass. This section will become a garden spot. Might even supply water to Phoenix."

"Who cares about new people to come?" countered Tilman. "Who cares about Phoenix? Let 'em get their water from the Verde or the Salt River."

"And so, to keep from movin'," said Raine softly, "the folks of Diablo Valley have gone to killin' off the surveyors for the dam project."

Ben Tilman looked honestly amazed.

"Who said that?" he demanded indignantly. "Them deaths was accidents. It's just that most folks ain't any too sorry about it."

"I think I'll talk to the mayor," observed Raine. "Whereabouts would I be apt to find him?"

"Likely at the hotel with Powell, the chief engineer," replied Tilman, handing over the repaired gun. Seventy-five cents."

Raine gave him a silver dollar, thanked him, and walked out.

## CHAPTER II

### *Tragedy at the Diamond*

THE moment Navajo Raine turned in the direction of the hotel he could see that excitement was already brewing. A small crowd had collected around Livingston's wagon, milling and talking. As Raine strode swiftly nearer his keen eyes picked out the key figures in the group.

A slender, red-faced man of middle-age with sandy mustache and hair streaked with gray, and clad in a business suit which had the stamp of the East about it, was talking to a pot-bellied man in shirt-sleeves. The pot-bellied man sported a walrus mustache and sideburns, although the top of his head was as bald as a peeled onion.

"But Mr. Powell," the onion-topped gent was protesting, trying to smile in a conciliatory manner as he mopped his perspiring brow with a blue bandanna. "Please listen! Wayne and Masters are kind of shook up

about this thing. Yuh can rest easy that I'll investigate."

"Investigate, the devil!" growled the chief engineer. "I have plenty of authority from the Governor and from Washington. This is the last straw. Murder or plain accident, I've had enough. I'm going to ask for a troop of cavalry from Fort McDowell to move everybody out of this Valley at once!"

Navajo Raine reached the spot in time to prevent an angry surge of the little crowd at Powell and his two flanking surveyors. Another man, dressed in the same general garb as the Government surveyors wore, a tall, blue-eyed chap with tanned features and a pleasant sort of air, leaned lazily against the nearest porch post and watched events.

Raine thrust his way through the crowd and gently tapped the irate Powell on the shoulder.

"I wouldn't do that just yet, Mr. Powell," he said gravely. "The Mayor is right. Let's investigate first."

Powell, an energetic and somewhat arrogant individual, whirled impatiently on the speaker.

"What in thunder have you got to do with it? Who are you, anyway?"

"Yeah," chimed in Mayor Colby, his eyes narrowing. "Who are yuh, stranger?"

"The name is Navajo Raine," answered Raine crisply, and exhibited a badge which he held in the palm of his hand.

"A Ranger!" exclaimed Colby, his eyes popping.

Theodore Powell was mad and was not particularly impressed. Wayne and Masters, however, exchanged swift glances, then stared with slack jaws. Lovington spat over the near wheel of his wagon.

"I figgered you jiggers would find out who that feller was," he said.

When the body of Sam Mayfield had been left at the undertaker's, and Powell had taken possession of the dead surveyor's papers and belongings, Navajo Raine talked with the engineer and the Mayor in Powell's temporary office headquarters. The Ranger had personally examined the body and found no marks or wounds of any kind other than those naturally incurred by being caught in a rock slide.

He was having difficulty with the two men. At odds with each other on the matter of Mayfield's death and the advisability of calling in troops, Powell and Colby seemed in accord in their efforts to freeze Navajo Raine out. Nevertheless, he had to get at the root of things.

"Tell me about Mayfield's death," he said firmly. "You begin, Mr. Powell."

The chief engineer grimaced but complied. "Mayfield was working at the north end of the Valley. He was alone, computing the watershed and drainage in that area. He should have reported last week. He didn't show up. Masters went to look for him. He found some of Mayfield's equipment on a mountain ledge above the slide. He poked around enough to believe Mayfield was under the pile of rocks. Three days ago, Wayne and a wagon went up to help. They brought Mayfield back this afternoon. That's all there is to it. But Wayne and Masters examined the spot and they say there's no reason that the rock should have fallen. And they know rocks."

"But slides do happen in mountains," protested Mayor Colby. "And whether it was accidental or not, that's no reason for bringin' in troops to run everybody out of this Valley. Negotiations are still goin' on, Powell. You know I'm givin' yuh all the help I can, but yuh can't argue everybody into leavin' peacefully, pullin' up stakes and leavin' all they got behind and rushin' out of here."

"I have my orders, Colby," said Powell acidly. "This project is definitely going through, and I must facilitate the removal of all families, as well as finish my survey. Work on the dam will start within the next thirty days. I am sending for U. S. troops tomorrow."

"Sorry," said Raine, "but yuh're not sendin' for any troop 'till I say so."

Powell bristled. "Young man, I have full authority here, invested in me by the Territorial Governor and the Federal Government. And if you think I am going to let my men be killed off one after the other without taking drastic steps, you are crazy!"

Raine reached into his jacket and pulled forth an official-looking envelope. He withdrew a paper and handed it to the irate engineer to read.

"Here," he said, "yuh'll find a special order from the Governor, dated ten days ago, which gives me full military authority in this Valley. This tops yore own orders, and I hope we won't have no trouble about it."

Powell choked and reddened as he read the document. Mayor Colby's face assumed a more worried look, instead of relief.

"But we don't want any lawmen buttin' in here!" he burst out. "We can settle things peacefully. We didn't ask for any Rangers."

RAINE glanced from one to the other. He foresaw trouble with both these men, so he let them have it straight.

"I don't know what yuh been tellin' Powell, Colby," he said tersely, "but yuh're directly responsible for me bein' here. The letters yuh been writin' to Washington and to the Governor and the ruckus yuh've been raisin' behind Powell's back against this project reached Captain Mossman at Bisbee. And when George Tidwell was killed, I was ordered to come here. I don't mean to be bossy, but I represent the law and I'll give the orders, and you men will save us all trouble if yuh'll work with me, not against me."

Powell turned on Colby. "Why, you confounded scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "All this time you have pretended to be helping me!"

Colby stood his ground. Out came his blue bandanna.

"Take it easy, Powell. Of course I don't want this town destroyed and all my friends moved and scattered. It'll ruin me. But it'll ruin a lot of other folks, too. Shore, I've been against it—legally. I got my rights and I'll fight for 'em, but I haven't been fightin' you personal. I knew that wouldn't do no good. You can't help what yuh're doin'. So I went over yore head. But I didn't ask for this Ranger to come here, and I don't like that any more than you do."

Powell gained control of himself and looked at the quietly waiting Raine.

"What do you intend to do?"

"First, I'm goin' to find out if yore men were killed accidentally—or murdered. In that last case I'll handle things. Then I'm goin' to help yuh convince Diablo Valley folks that they'll have to move pronto. And yuh're goin' to listen to me, Colby. If I fail"—he shrugged—"the troops'll come. I might add there ain't any sense in anybody killin' me. Captain Mossman would only send in more Rangers, and they won't be as pleasant about things as I aim to be."

Powell seemed relieved at this blunt statement.

"All right," he said. "I'll cooperate. But what about protecting my men?"

"Arm 'em," replied Raine, "and tell 'em to go on about their business as if nothin' has happened. I'll dig into the Tidwell affair as soon as I finish with this newest case. Come on, Colby, I'll walk back to the hotel with yuh. Powell, I'll want either Masters or Wayne to go with me to the place tomorrow mornin' where they found Mayfield."

"I only have a few rifles," said Powell, "but I guess that'll be all right."

Mayor Colby lumbered out into the street without another word. That he was deeply perturbed was evident to the keenly observant Ranger. Raine let him stew in his mental juice.

"Yuh say, Raine," the bald-headed man asked after a moment, "that there ain't no doubt about us havin' to go?"

"None," answered Navajo. "It's tough jerky, but it'll mean the best for everybody in the long run. I'll do all I can to make it easy."

Colby sighed. Then he squared his shoulders. There was something admirable about his bulldoggish attitude.

"I won't give up yet. The Government's been known to change its mind before. Nobody's signed up to move yet. Nobody's took any money."

"Yuh've talked against it, I suppose."

"Shore," admitted Colby frankly. "I own the bank. I've told everybody who asked me that this was no good. Nearly everybody in town owes me money. Like Ben Tilman. I loaned him money to get his shop started. If we have to move he can never pay me back. Look at Chris Sanjoy. He's had a bad time for several years. Just recent he's come into a little money—a couple thousand dollars—which he's sunk in his Diamond S ranch. Bought some cattle, made improvements, just gettin' a good hold on things. A move'll ruin him, too. The Government never pays what everything's worth to a man, and they can't pay him back his lost time. Chris and me are too old to go gallivantin' off to new fields. And folks in Diablo Valley look to Chris Sanjoy and me for leadership. Whatever we decide to do, they'll do."

As they neared the two-storied frame building that was the hotel Raine noticed that the blue-eyed chap in surveyor garb was still on the porch.

"Who is that, Colby?" he asked. "One of Powell's men?"

Colby glanced and shook his head. "Nope. That's an ore prospector by name of Whelan. Some sort of geologist who's been in and out of Diablo City the last two or three years. Now, fellers like that can't get hurt. They can just drift to some other locality. But us folks who have taken root find it different."

They ascended the steps to the porch, and the man under discussion got to his feet and approached.

"Mr. Raine?" he said, holding out his hand. "My name is Barry Whelan. I'm a prospector. I know a lot about rocks myself. If you're going to dig around to investigate Mayfield's death, I'd be mighty glad to go along and help. But I must warn you I don't believe these local folks are to blame, even though feeling does run high. Accidents do happen in mountains. Tidewell fell off a cliff. I was with Wayne and Mayfield when they found him."

"All right, Whelan," agreed Raine, shaking hands. "Glad to have yuh along. We'll leave at six in the mornin'."

Raine spent the rest of the evening talking to folks along the main street of the little settlement. He found nobody making preparations to depart the Valley. Colby had done a good job of blocking an exodus. Powell would have known this if he had not been so autocratic. But being an Easterner besides, he hadn't been able to get folks to talk to him. His men might have had better luck if there hadn't been a growing wall of distrust and hatred between them and the natives.

NAVAJO understood only too well how such things could be. He recalled his own bitter youth in the Tonto Basin when that bloody war in which he lost his father had been brewing. He felt a deep sympathy and kinship toward these people who were

doomed to be uprooted, but nothing could swerve him from the strict pursuance of his duty. If murder had been done, the killer must pay.

Promptly at six o'clock in the morning, astride Wampum, his blue roan, and accompanied by Wayne and Whelan, he headed up the Valley to the scene of the Mayfield tragedy. Whelan wore a six-shooter at his hip in the manner of a man accustomed to sidearms. Wayne carried no small weapon, but he now had a high-powered rifle in a saddle-boot under his left leg.

About two-thirds the way up the Valley they passed a partially fenced section on their left, a small ranch which ran back into a draw of the western ridge. The buildings looked comfortable, homey, pleasant in their dressings of fresh whitewash.

"The Diamond S," vouchsafed Wayne. "Whelan can tell you more about it than I can. He is sparking Sanjoy's daughter."

Whelan reddened slightly and laughed. "I'm not having much luck," he said. "Chris seems to like me, but Millie seems to favor Ben Tilman."

"Yuh never can tell about the heart of a woman," said Raine. "Mebbe I'll stop to meet Sanjoy on the way back."

Noon found the three men at the head of the Valley. Wayne pointed out the rock slide, which was self-evident as a new and raw cut in the face of a precipitous ledge. At the Ranger's signal they dismounted and began looking around. Wayne and Whelan argued in more or less friendly fashion over the nature of the slide, while Raine listened and continued looking.

At some considerable danger to life and limb Navajo climbed to the ledge and approached the point where cleavage had occured. The other men remained on the Valley floor some forty feet below and watched him curiously. There was little for even a geologist's eye to note, but Navajo Raine had eyes trained by Indians, and he overlooked nothing. There were several peculiar markings in the rock face at the top of the ledge, but the crumbling and sliding rocks had obliterated most traces.

Nevertheless, Raine scrambled back to the Valley floor and began examining hunks of rock and debris in the pile of rubble which had buried the unfortunate surveyor. At last he found what he sought—a chunk of rock which had a blackened surface and several queer little pits in it. Not enough for the average man to base an opinion on, but ample for the astute Ranger.

"Like I said," remarked Wayne, "I can't prove anything, but that rock formation shows no seam or undercutting which would tear it loose from that ledge. There was no overhang. So why did it give way?"

"I tell you it was an accident, man!" insisted Whelan. "Likely a rotten seam eaten away by moisture and not visible on the surface. You can see flecks of ore there. These hills are rotten with small veins of low-grade lead and silver. It must have been an accident."

"Shore," said Raine, pointing at the chunk of rock he held. "An accident, helped along with a few pounds of blastin' powder. And I found a couple of partial drill marks up there. Mayfield didn't cause that slide by standin' on it. He was standin' under the ledge when it let go. Remember yuh told me, Wayne, yuh had to dig to the bottom of this rubble to get at his body."

"I can't believe it!" said Harry Whelan, stunned. "If that's true, Mayfield must have set off the blast himself by accident."

Wayne's face was hard. "Only he had no blasting powder with him and no reason for doing any drilling," he said grimly. "You don't know these nesters like I do, Whelan. You're soft about them because of that Sanjoy girl."

Whelan flushed and doubled his fist. "The Sanjoy's are not nesters!" he flared up angrily. "And don't you try to put ideas in Raine's head!"

Navajo stepped between the two. "Take it easy, men," he cautioned. "I haven't said who is to blame for this. I just read sign and told yuh how it happened. Come on, let's get back to town."

They remounted and rode rapidly down the Valley.

"I guess you won't want to stop by Sanjoy's place now," opined Wayne.

"Especially now," was Raine's noncomittal response.

But they turned in at the Diamond S, although they saw Ben Tilman's horse at the front hitch-rail. Ben Tilman himself was standing on the ranchhouse porch, his arms around a sobbing girl. He looked sick.

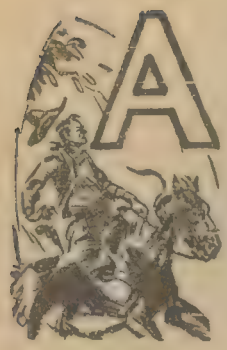
"What's wrong here?" called Raine.

"It's Chris Sanjoy," replied the cowboy craftsman in a dull voice. "He's been killed. Somebody shot him through the head with a rifle bullet."

Jim Hatfield, of the Texas Rangers, Is at His Fighting and Sleuthing Best in SIX-GUN SURVEY, a Complete Action Novel by Jackson Cole, Featured in the December Issue of Our Companion Magazine TEXAS RANGERS—Now on Sale Everywhere, 10c at All Stands!

## CHAPTER III

### *Mob Fury*



A FEELING of impending disaster smote Navajo Raine. With bloodshed on both sides now, a local war seemed unavertible. The whole valley might go up in flames, and there would be no question of the coming of U.S. troops. But who had killed Christopher Sanjoy? And why?

That it could be the handiwork of a third interest did not seem reasonable. To start a war between the Valley folk and the Government would only force the issue and make the Government act all the more firmly and quickly. Nothing would be gained.

Nevertheless, Raine did not cast out completely the idea that a third party might be inerested. At the same time, if this were not the deed of one of the incensed surveyors, it could have been a personal matter, something disassociated with the dam site trouble. There was rivalry between Whelan and Tilman for this girl, and Chris Sanjoy had favored the prospector. Ben Tilman was not to be overlooked.

Raine removed his hat and climbed the porch steps. He eyed the weeping girl with pity. Millie Sanjoy was a sweet-faced little thing with auburn hair and wide gray eyes.

"I'm terribly sorry to hear this, ma'am," he said gently. "My name is Navajo Raine. I'm an Arizona Ranger. Suppose yuh tell me what yuh can about this."

He noticed, as the pair separated, the petrified wood brooch which Tilman had been polishing yesterday. It was pinned now on the front of the girl's shirtwaist. That explained Tilman's presence here today—or was an excuse for his presence.

"You tell him, Ben," murmured the girl.

"I come out this mornin' to see Millie and —er—bring her a present," said Tilman, indicating the brooch. "Must of been about ten o'clock. Millie was worried about her father. He'd gone out after supper last night and hadn't come back. Millie thought he'd rode up the draw lookin' for strays or to repair a fence he'd been talkin' about. When he didn't show up by dark she thought mebbe he'd gone to town like he said he was goin' to do today. When I come and hadn't seen him in town we got worried more. So I rode up the draw to hunt for Chris. I found him on the hillslope, dead. I brought him back to the house just now."

"Yuh shouldn't have moved him," reproved Raine.

"Why not?" said Tilman defensively. "He'd been layin' there all night. There was still dew on his clothes. I looked for sign, but nobody had been close to the body. Besides, he was killed at a distance with a rifle."

"Let me see the body," said Raine.

Tilman led the way into the house, Raine and Wayne following. Whelan halted on the porch to talk to the girl, his pleasant face tender with sympathy, and something else.

Ben Tilman had told it all. Chris Sanjoy had been shot through the head, apparently from some distance away and by a rifle. It was now mid-afternoon and the body was cold and growing stiff. Raine roughly placed the time of death somewhere between ten o'clock the night before and dawn.

He was uncomfortably aware that Powell had armed his surveyors with rifles the evening before. Wayne had a saddle-gun with him today. But other folks owned rifles, too. The Ranger had one outside on Wampum himself.

Wayne must have been thinking the same thing. "I don't believe any of our crew had anything to do with this," he insisted, "but if they did, you can bet it was self-defense."

"At a distance, with a rifle?" asked Raine dryly.

"Shucks!" exclaimed Tilman. "Chris never even drawed or fired his six-gun."

Wayne remained silent, but his eyes were troubled. Whelan came in and was apprised of the meager facts. He looked suspiciously at the surveyor.

"Masters is a hothead," he began, "and he thought a lot of Mayfield. I—"

"Don't say anything you might be sorry for, Whelan," warned the surveyor.

"I won't. This isn't really my fight, but I'm throwing in with the Valley folks, and I'm warning you, Wayne, that if your crew is mixed up in this, you'll pay for it."

"Let's have no war talk," said Navajo Raine incisively. "I'm deputizin' both of you men to help me. Hitch up a wagon and take Sanjoy's body to town. I'll be along as soon as Tilman and I look around some."

"I thought I'd take Millie to town myself," said Tilman in disappointment, looking askance at Whelan. "Yuh're makin' big talk for her benefit, mister."

For the first time Wayne relaxed a trifle.

"I'll be along, Tilman," he said in a friendly way. "I'll help take care of the lady."

With that arranged, Raine and Tilman rode together up the draw toward the western ridge.

When they reached the spot where the cowboy craftsman had found Sanjoy's body, Raine began quartering the ground carefully. It was rather rugged country back there, with the terrain sloping sharply upward.

"What yuh doin', Navajo?" demanded Tilman impatiently. "I told yuh nobody was close to Chris when it happened."

"Yuh overlooked one or two points, Ben," said the Ranger. "Sanjoy was shot after dark. There wasn't much light, even if it happened after the moon rose. Pretty good shootin' for a man to plug another through the head at a distance. Like a mountaineer knockin' a squirrel out of a tree at a hundred yards, don't yuh think?"

Tilman stared in dawning comprehension, his jaw slack.

"Pretty rough country for a drygulcher to be far away and have a clear shot, too," went on Raine. "That would need a high point, and daylight."

Tilman nodded and snapped his jaw shut. Without a word he began scouring the ground to help seek sign.

THEY found it about twenty yards from where Sanjoy had fallen—a .30-30 shell behind a clump of brush. Sanjoy had been shot with a rifle, but not from a distance. Quite possibly he had been talking with his murderer.

"Well, I'll be danged!" said Tilman. "But this still don't tell us who it was. Ground's too hard for footprints."

"But we know somethin'," said Raine, pocketing the empty shell. He pointed toward the top of the ridge. "What's over beyond the hill?"

"Just another valley. Higher than Diablo Valley and more open. That's why the engineers didn't survey that for storin' water. Too shallow, too high, and too wide at the mouth. Why?"

Navajo was studying the rock formation at the head of the draw. He saw a few hammer and drill marks here and there. He picked up a specimen of loose rock and examined its queer sheen intently.

"Did Sanjoy do any prospectin'?" he asked idly.

"No. But I think he filed on the mineral rights to this place when he homesteaded it. There ain't any valuable mineral around Diablo Valley. Whelan and others have explored it pretty well."

"How thick is this ridge?" asked Raine. "Come on, let's climb it and sort of look over the adjoinin' valley."

Tilman looked at his companion as though he were crazy, and shook his head in wonder. Nevertheless, he followed as the Ranger led the way up the ridge out of the draw.

"Who owns the next valley?" Raine panted as they toiled toward the summit.

"I guess nobody does. Mebbe one or two families over there. Why?"

"Might be that Diablo folks could all move in one body just over this ridge."

"What good would that do? They'd still lose all their time and most of their possessions."

Raine still carried the rock fragment he had picked up. He didn't answer. Tilman demurred again when, after they reached the top and glanced over the next valley, Raine started down the slope.

"This is a heck of a way to investigate Chris' killin'. I'm goin' on back to Diablo City."

"Just a minute, Ben, and I'll go with yuh. This ain't idle curiosity."

As they worked their way down toward the floor of the shallow valley Raine stopped several times to examine the exposed rock here and there. He finally uttered an exclamation and picked up a fragment which he compared to the chunk he had brought with him from Sanjoy's draw. They were almost identical in structure, and he showed them to his companion.

"Yeah, I see," said Tilman. "But what of it? Chris wasn't killed with a rock."

"Mebbe he was killed because of rock," said Raine. "I don't know too much about geology, but if there's any valuable ore on Sanjoy's side of this ridge, the same thing is true of this side. And I think I know what it is. What does it look like to you?"

"A poor piece of petrified wood," replied Tilman frankly.

Raine smiled thinly and pocketed the two rock specimens.

"Let's get on back to town," he said.

They rode into Diablo City before sundown. Parting from Tilman, Raine sought Millie Sanjoy who had a room temporarily at the Pine Tree Hotel.

"Miss Sanjoy," he said, "there are a few questions I'd like to ask yuh. Did anybody call on your father yesterday at any time?"

"No," answered the girl. "Not unless he saw somebody out on the range."

"Then why was yore father intendin' to come to town last night or this mornin'? Do yuh know?"

"Oh, yes. It was about us having to move. Daddy and I had been talkin' about it for some time and last night at supper he told me that he'd made up his mind. There was no use bucking the Government, and he was coming to town today to tell Mr. Colby and Mr. Powell that he would accept the Government's offer for his spread and would move out peacefully. We—we were thinking of going down into the Rio Grande valley country."

This was startling information. Navajo Raine considered it quickly, his mind clicking back over a number of things. If Sanjoy had decided to move, most of the Valley folks would have followed suit. Diablo Valley would have capitulated. And this wouldn't have suited Mayor Colby at all. It would have meant the beginning of the end.

"I understood from the Mayor that you and yore father came into a little money not long ago," pursued Raine tactfully. "Would yuh mind tellin' me about that?"

"Not at all. Only I don't know anything

about it. Daddy didn't explain it to me. He just said he had sold some intangible rights for two thousand dollars, and we would invest the money in the ranch."

"The money didn't come from relatives or elsewhere, then?"

"No. Daddy brought it home in greenbacks. Then he took it to the bank."

"So somebody must have brought the cash into Diablo Valley to him?"

"Of course."

"When was this? Since the news came that folks had to move out of the Valley?"

"No, indeed. This was some time last year. If we had known about the dam we wouldn't have started making improvements on the place."

"I see. But what he sold, or who he sold to, yuh don't know?"

"No. But you may be sure it wasn't anything dishonest, Mr. Raine."

"I'm shore of that, Miss Millie. I see yuh're wearin' a brooch that Ben Tilman was makin' yesterday. Anything between you and Ben?"

MILLIE colored slightly, but she met his gaze frankly.

"Ben and I are in love. We are going to be married—some day."

"Yore father knew of this?"

"Why, of course. That was one of the reasons we couldn't make up our minds to move from Diablo Valley. Last night Daddy said he was going to talk to Ben and convince him that—that we could get married right away and leave here together." Her eyes filled with tears, and she bit her lower lip. "Now I don't know what will happen."

"Just wait a bit, ma'am," soothed Navajo Raine. "I think things will work out all right yet for yuh. I got to see a couple more people, then I'll talk to yuh again."

"But—but what about my father? Who killed him, and—"

"I'll arrest his killer before mornin', ma'am, and that's a promise."

Raine patted the girl on the shoulder and withdrew.

"Well, that lets Ben Tilman out as far as I'm concerned," he murmured to himself as he descended the stairs. "Now for Mayor Colby."

He located the Mayor on his way to supper and buttonholed him. Under protest Colby unlocked the bank and took the Ranger inside. He produced the land books which he kept as local territorial representative, and Raine went through them carefully. He found that Christopher Sanjoy had homesteaded his little spread some five years previous, shrewdly filing on the mineral rights, just as Tilman had said.

Searching clear up to date, Raine found no record of Sanjoy having sold any rights or parts of his property. He had not even had a mortgage on the place.

"Just what yuh lookin' for, Raine?" demanded Colby uneasily.

"Any sort of transaction between Sanjoy —and anybody. There wasn't a private deal between you and him, was there?"

"Not of any kind," denied the Mayor emphatically.

"Yuh don't know where he got that two thousand dollars then?"

"He wouldn't tell me. Said he'd promised to keep it a secret for a while. Honest, Raine, this killin' of Chris Sanjoy just about tears me up."

"I reckon," agreed Raine grimly. "Did yuh know that Sanjoy had decided to accept Powell's orders and leave Diablo Valley?"

"Millie told me this afternoon," admitted Colby, mopping his shiny head with his blue bandanna.

"Yuh didn't call on Sanjoy last night with a rifle, did yuh?"

"Of course not! You saw me right here in town yore own self."

"I didn't see anybody between nine o'clock last night and five this mornin'," said Raine significantly. "Anybody could have gone to kill Sanjoy and come back. I—"

A pistol shot punctuated his words. As he and Colby both stiffened to attention there came another shot, and then a volley, to be answered by the sharp flat crack of a rifle. Out in the street, shouts and yells arose.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Coppered Bet*

NAVAJO RAINE whirled about and raced for the door. Colby thrust his bandanna into his pocket and followed heavily after the Ranger. Out in the dusty street, surrounding the office of Theodore Powell in the lingering twilight, a small mob had gathered. Milling around, barricading themselves behind barrels and horse-troughs, even climbing to the flat roofs of neighboring buildings, crouching at corners, a mass of townsfolk and several men from the range were besieging the Government engineers.

Armed with six-shooters and rifles and shotguns, the people of Diablo Valley were out to exact vengeance for the death of their neighbor and leader. Guns continued to roar spasmodically. From within the little frame office building men were replying from the corners of windows with rifles. In the van of the attacking crowd were Ben Tilman and

Barry Whelan.

Reckless of flying lead, Navajo. Raine sprinted from the front door of the bank toward the scene of the assault.

"Give us the killer!" rose angry shouts. "We want Masters! We'll hang the dirty drygulcher!"

The Arizona Ranger hurled himself past the rear flanks of the attackers and reached the middle of the street before the little office. He flung up both hands and raised his voice in a mighty Indian yell.

"Stop!" he continued. "In the name of the law! Stop firin'!"

In spite of themselves the mob hesitated and obeyed. The sight of that aroused and majestic figure in buckskins was too much to be disobeyed. And the gleaming badge exposed in one upraised palm was too great a might to be ignored.

The angry voice of Theodore Powell sounded harshly in the stillness from behind Raine.

"Better get out of here and go after the troops you wouldn't let me send for, Ranger. That mob has shot two of my men bad."

"There'll be no more shootin', Powell!" yelled Raine in a stern voice. "Here, you men! What's the meanin' of this?"

"Get out of the way, Raine," called Ben Tilman, his voice bleak. "We don't want to hurt a lawman, but we found out that Masters was ridin' up the Valley last night with a rifle. We're goin' to hang him for killin' Chris Sanjoy!"

"Don't be a fool, Tilman," called Raine sharply. "A lot of people carry rifles. Masters didn't kill Sanjoy. I promise to arrest the killer and take him to Phoenix for a legal trial."

"You're crazy, Ranger!" yelled Whelan. "These folks are in the right, and I'm siding them. If Powell won't give up the killer, we'll clean them all out."

"Yuh're the one who's crazy, Whelan," retorted Navajo Raine savagely. "This sort of thing will only bring the troops quicker!"

"But we want the killer," said Ben Tilman in a milder but still stubborn tone.

"Wait!" shouted Raine. "I'll give yuh the killer, but yuh mustn't lay hands on him. He's my prisoner."

Men began to edge closer. The office door opened and Theodore Powell stepped out, a rifle in his hand. Wayne and Masters flanked him, gripping their own hot guns. A red patch stained the shoulder of Master's shirt, and Wayne had a crude bandage made of his torn shirt-sleeve around his head.

"Where is this prisoner?" demanded Powell curtly, glaring around the street. "I've seen enough of your bungling, Raine."

"Colby!" shouted Raine. "Where are yuh? Come forward."

A murmur ran through the crowd like angry water over a shoal. Mayor Colby, his whisker-framed face as white as the top of his bald head, staggered through the crowd and approached.

Navajo Raine knew he was cutting things mighty thin, but his hand had been forced before he was quite ready, and he had to take a chance now.

"Colby," he said, his eyes raking the circle of men behind the Mayor and locating certain persons, "I call on you to take Barry Whelan into custody for me as the murderer of George Tidwell, Sam Mayfield and Christopher Sanjoy!"

"What?" yelled the accused man in swift alarm. And the crowd yammered.

"That's right," said Raine, his voice cold and dispassionate. "In June of last year yuh paid Christopher Sanjoy two thousand dollars for the mineral rights to his land and asked him to keep the matter a secret for a while. But yuh didn't tell him yuh'd already located a vein of copper in the ridge behind his home ranch. And yuh didn't file yore deed because yuh wanted to get the mineral rights to the whole ridge before anybody learned what yuh had.

"But Fate dealt yuh an unexpected blow when the Government decided to put a dam across Satan's Gap and turn Diablo Valley into a lake. This would have ruined yore chance to mine for yore copper, so yuh fought against it, lettin' Colby and Sanjoy be yore shields. Yuh deliberately killed two surveyors to scare the Government men away. Outside of the surveyors, yuh're the only man in this valley who had any blastin' powder.

"And when yuh learned the same day an Arizona Ranger had come to investigate and that Sanjoy had decided to move, yuh sneaked Wayne's or Masters' rifle out last night and went to kill Sanjoy when yuh couldn't persuade him to stay. Because if Sanjoy moved, then everybody would move, and yore mine would be lost to yuh."

A TERRIBLE silence had descended on both factions of the crowd as Raine made his accusations. Men drew aside from the prospector, leaving him standing there alone before his accuser. And as the Ranger spoke, Whelan's face went through the gamut of emotions. Gradually he shrank into the crouch of a gunfighter, his right hand clawed just above the butt of his six-shooter. "You lie, Ranger!" he burst out. "You are making up a mass of lies. You can't prove any of that!"

"But I can," contradicted Raine sternly. "I found blastin' powder in yore hotel room closet. . . Ben Tilman, who told yuh Masters rode out last night with a rifle?"

"Why—why, Whelan did," admitted Tilman.

What happened then was too fast for talk.

[Turn to page 68]

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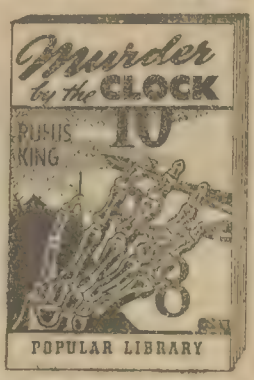


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Whelan uttered a baffled cry and went for his gun. The astonished Mayor had not a chance of lunging forward and grappling with him. Whelan's gun flashed up. But he was exposing himself to a master of the six-gun.

Navajo Raine's hands simply seemed to blur. Both of his turquoise-mounted gun-butts were gripped in his strong hands and he fired once with each gun. Whelan's shot tore past his head. But that was the only shot the trapped prospector fired. A pair of slugs crashed into his shoulders, breaking the bones and driving him back to the ground a broken and pain-racked shadow of a man, helpless and bleeding. But alive. He was denied escape even from hanging.

"Wait!" called Navajo Raine as a babble of voices arose.

He sheathed his guns and strode to the side of his unconscious victim. Kneeling, he deftly began going through Whelan's clothes. He found what he was seeking at last, a money-belt around the prospector's waist. It was a deed to the Diamond S mineral rights, assigned to Barry Whelan by Christopher Sanjoy for the sum of two thousand dollars and dated in June of the previous year.

"This is the final proof I needed," said Raine, breathing a sigh of relief. "I didn't have time to get it before the fracas started. But Whelan knew I'd find it if I arrested him, and he just couldn't bluff his way through. Gents, I reckon this sort of clears up this business without callin' in U. S. cavalry." [*Turn to page 70*]


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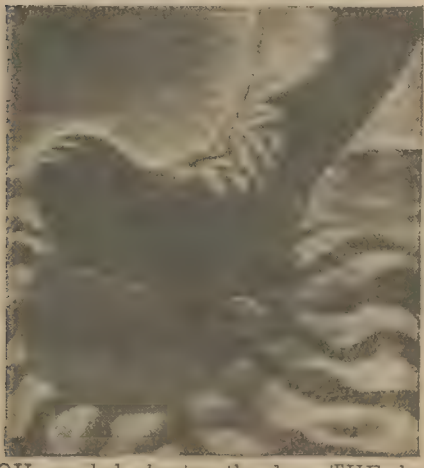

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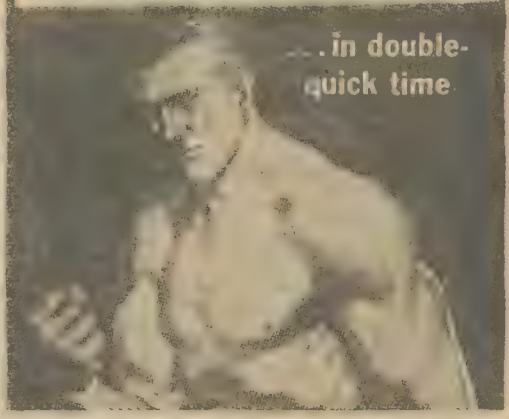


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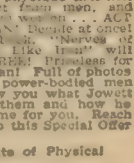

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Theodore Powell, whatever else he was, knew how to make a handsome apology.

"Raine," he said, "I take off my hat to the Arizona Rangers. You are a man!"

"Thanks, Mr. Powell," said Raine modestly. "I'm not quite finished yet. There's the business of movin' folks out of this Valley. I looked up the ownership of the Valley just west of here and I find it is still territory land. Diablo can be moved across the ridge. And to pay 'em extra for the trouble, Sanjoy's copper can be mined from the other side. That vein of ore runs clear through the hill. Everybody in town and on the range can have a share in the mine—as soon as Colby and Ben Tilman get together with Millie Sanjoy and file on the rest of the vein."

"But what about Whelan's right to it?" objected Mayor Colby.

Navajo Raine handed the deed to Colby.

"He never filed it, and he forfeited his right to it when he killed Chris Sanjoy. But if it will ease yore conscience any, yuh might take up a collection of two thousand dollars from the folks of Diablo Valley and give Whelan a right handsome funeral—after the law hangs him."

"I'll put up fifty dollars myself," declared Masters shakily.

"So'll I," said Wayne. "I certainly underestimated this Ranger."

There was a tug at their sleeves. They turned to see the old hostler, Covington, standing beside them.

"I told you men yuh'd find out who that feller was," he remarked sagely.

Navajo Raine laid a friendly hand on Ben Tilman's shoulder.

"I think there's a young lady waitin' at the hotel for news, Ben," he said. "Suppose yuh go tell it to her."

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NEXT ISSUE!

# *Must You Travel in Wartime?*

## *An Important Message for All Patriotic Americans*

By

**CLIFTON FADIMAN**

GO AHEAD and travel for pleasure all you want to—IF you want to take the bus seat of some sailor who might be making his last trip home to see his folks.

Go ahead and travel, it's a free country—IF you want to compete for your Pullman berth with a wounded soldier just back from France.

Go ahead and travel. Take your family, too. There isn't any *law* against traveling for pleasure. But be prepared to wait in line an hour or so for tickets, with a lot of fidgety kids all around you. Get ready to stand in the aisles for hours at a time—not everybody gets a seat today by a long shot.

CLIFTON FADIMAN

Don't tell anyone to meet you—for you may be from one to four hours late. Better get into good condition, too—you'll probably have to carry all your own luggage.

Go ahead and travel—enjoy yourself. All you'll have on your conscience is the fact that the Government begs you not to, that the railroads are moving a mere million-and-a-half troops a month, with less and older equipment than ever and an alarming shortage of manpower. All you'll have to face is the fact that *most* patriotic Americans are heeding this plea.

Isn't it a shame that just a couple of million selfish people who *must* see Aunt Minnie in Nashville, who *must* play that golf course in Michigan, who *must* have "a change," are gumming up the works?

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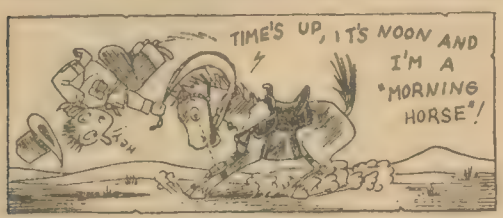
# The Cowboy HAD A WORD for it!

By CHUCK STANLEY

MOST of the cowboys on the ranch where our favorite tenderfoot was learning the riding and ranching ropes decided that he was a good sport, so they were more than willing to teach him something about riding, roping, and branding. He realized he would not become adept in any of these fields until he was able to hold his own on a horse.

Early one morning, he headed for the "corral," and watched while the "wrangler" hooked a horse to the "snubbing post," and started to put on a saddle and bridle. In talking to the "horse-tender" he learned that the average cowboy used seven horses in a twenty-four hour period. These were two "morning horses"; two "afternoon horses," one "night




horse," and two "cutting horses." Except for the usual stamina required of horses on the range, there was little outstanding about either the "morning" or "afternoon" horses.

However, the "night horse" was definitely an animal worth knowing about. Special horses bred for this type of work were the surest-footed and keenest-eyed in any "remuda." The cowboy humorously referred to his "night horse" as his "night-mare."

The collective name for the seven horses in a cowboy's "string" was his "average mount." A cutting horse was also one that often attracted attention in any waddy's remuda, and our tenderfoot was amazed at the tricks some of these animals picked up. They were the horses responsible for a cowboy expression that has come down to the present. They could "turn on a dime and give back nine cents."

## The Story of the Saddle

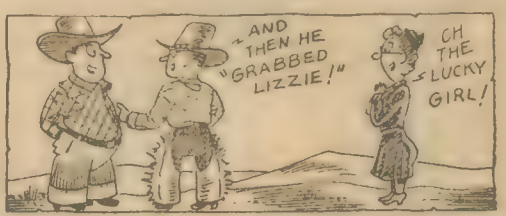
As our "Arbuckle" watched the saddling of the horse that was going to be his mount, he realized that there were a good many things to be learned, not only about the horses, but also about the saddles and bridles that went onto them. He watched while the "saddle blanket" was placed on the animal's back, and recalled that cowboys also used this term to describe the "cookie's" griddle cakes.

Most cowboys carried their saddles from the racks to the horse by means of the saddle-horn. When he studied the saddle he was to use, he discovered that the horn was made of metal, mounted over the pommel. He knew of its importance as a grip for "snubbing" the "lariat," or as a handy grip for a tenderfoot rider.

"Where did it get the name 'horn'?" he asked.

The wrangler looked over his shoulder and said: "That's another term we get from the Spaniards. In the good old days, the early Spanish saddle-makers used a piece of polished horn for this part of the saddle. But the cowboy has a number of other words for it."

The "greenhorn" discovered that it was more familiarly referred to as the "nubbin," "the apple," "the biscuit," or just plain "Lizzie." When a "buckaroo" spoke of "grab-




bing Lizzie," he wasn't getting ready to head out for a "shindig" or a "hoe-down"; he was simply grabbing the saddle-horn to keep from going over the head of a "bucker."

## Tenderfoot Bit the Dust

While his acquaintance with the saddle and its appurtenances was going on, the "Arbuckle" finally took hold of the reins and climbed into saddle. The other cowboys on the ranch were gathering on the top rail of the corral, or the "opera house" as it was called, and this time they really hoped that the tenderfoot would be able to "sit his mount."

However, even though this horse was gentler than the one our "lent" had been initiated on, he found difficulty in staying erect. When he finally slid over the horse's shoulder, and landed in the dust, laughing at his own discomfort, there were a number of comments

from the "buckaroos" to describe his predicament.

Some of them spoke of his having "landed"; others said "he bit the dust." One or two described his fall as "chewing gravel," "kissing the ground," and "landing on his sombrero." An Indian bystander would have pointed out that the "Arbuckle" was "sunning his moccasins." On the range he would have been "out grass-hunting."

Instead of doing any one of these things literally, our "shorthorn" climbed to his feet, dusted himself off, and decided to try all over again. He didn't want to tell his new-found "waddy" friends that most of his riding had been on an English saddle. The cowboys derisively referred to such a saddle as a "pimple," a "hog-skin," a "kidney-pad" or a "postage stamp."

The ranch owner, having seen the way the first horse had handled his new "hand," suggested that they "rope" a "saddler" for him. "Saddlers" were horses that had an easy, comfortable gait. This time, the tenderfoot took his saddle from the now-calmed mare that had thrown him, and under the guidance of the "horse-pestler" moved it over to the "saddler."

He brought the "cinch" or "cincha" under the horse, and led it up to the "saddle ring" where it was fastened. As he worked, the nearest "wrangler" explained that the word "cinch" came from the Spanish "cincha" which described the broad belly band of

woven horsehair, canvas, cord, or leather plaited straps. The metal ring attached at each end was referred to as the "cinch ring." There were two other rings attached to the "tree" of the saddle, which were called the "saddle rings," or the "rigging rings." Some cowboys also described them as the "tree rings."

"When yuh're down Texas way," the "hostler" pointed out, "yuh'll always call yore 'cincha' a 'girth.'"

## A Lot of Gadgets

This sounded curious to the "greener," because naturally Texas was close to Mexico and the Spanish origin of the word. The two sets of rings, one on the saddle and one on the girth, were brought together and tightened by the "latigo." At first glance, the job of making the "latigo" perform its job appeared to be a difficult one, but the "lent" discovered that if he tied it as though it were a four-in-hand necktie, it came out all right.

When the tenderfoot was ready to climb aboard the "saddler," one of the cowboys said:

"Yuh'd better give him a 'bucking roll'."

Naturally the "shorthorn" was curious

[*Turn page*]

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about what this meant, and he soon discovered that it referred to a roll of blankets tied across the front of the saddle between the horn and the rider. This wedged the cowboy in the saddle, and made it easier for him to stay on a bronc. It was also described as a "saddle roll."

After a few minutes on the back of the "saddler," and a pacing journey around the corral and out through the gate, it began to look as though the tenderfoot had found his "mount." He looked over the saddle he was riding, and discovered it was what was known as a Mexican saddle in one of the Eastern sporting goods stores. This meant that it was a Western saddle "tree" covered with rawhide, and with a "single cinch" or "rig."

There were also "tapaderos" and "saddle-bags" attached. It had the high saddle-horn which was later adopted by the makers of American saddles.

The "tapaderos" or "tapaderas" were the leather stirrup covers intended to protect the rider from brush, rocks, cacti or the teeth

of biting horses. They were wedge-shaped leather coverings that ran over the front and sides of the stirrup. Usually the cowboy was content to merely call them ordinary "taps."

## He Wants to Coil His Rope

As his knowledge of the mechanics of horseback riding increased, our tenderfoot discovered new words to add to his lexicon. The word "mount" was one of these, chiefly because of its variety of meanings. The word, when used by a range-bred rider, might refer to the act of climbing aboard a horse, the horse itself, a group of horses belonging to a single cowboy, or the nearest low hill. The Spanish equivalent of this many-sided word was "montura."

"What yuh want to do next?" asked one of the "old-timers" or "mossbacks," as he harked back in memory to the first day he had been able to remain on the "hurricane deck" of a full-grown horse.

"I'd like to see how it feels to handle a lariat up here," the tenderfoot replied without hesitation.

One of the cowboys nodded to the others, then they passed a rope to the "Arbuckle," and he started coiling it carefully so as not to frighten the horse. The minute he had the lasso in his hand, he discovered that he was again holding a bit of Western equipment that had almost as many names as the Tower of Babel.

Some of the "buckaroos" referred to it as a "lass rope," others called it "the line"; some described it as the "clothes-line," while another group favored "string," "manila," "hemp," "whale-line," "maguey," "twine," and "catgut." To our tenderfoot it was a lasso, and he ran into difficulty with it from

the first moment. Handling a rope on the back of a horse is a science in itself, and it's a science that isn't learned in one lesson.

He was flattered, however, by the remarks of some of the friendlier cowboys that he sure looked like a real "saddle-warmer," or a "saddle stiff." Others pointed out that he looked more like a "saddle-slicker." When these words were applied to him, it was like an accolade to a winning athlete. The "Arbuckle" knew that he had really "arrived." He had been accepted as one of the boys.

After a bit more riding around the corral and the ranch-yard, the "greener" was willing to get down. He had no desire to eat off the fireplace or mantelpiece. He lifted several of the rawhide strings dangling from the saddle and asked about them. They were called "saddle strings," and while originally put on the saddle to hold the leather top and bottom together, later became useful for carrying small packages, fastening on "conchas" or silver coin ornaments, and other things. They also supplied handy "pigging" or "hogging" strings for binding the feet of calves ready for branding.

## "Clawing Leather"

The ranch owner came over and patted the tenderfoot on the shoulder.

"One thing I'm glad to see," he said, "is that yuh've got courage. I don't like one of these 'safety first' cowboys."

The tenderfoot liked that, and said so. But some of the expressions in cowboy lingo were still a puzzle to him. Now, however, he found it easier to ask questions about them, because the cowboys no longer made fun of him, or raised their eyes at his ignorance. He soon discovered that their earlier chuckles were a form of fun, and that the average "cowpuncher" was a good-natured soul who went in for only good clean, and harmless fun for the most part.

"A 'safety first' cowboy," one of them told him, "is a feller who holds onto the saddle-horn when he's ridin' a new hoss."

If this had been the only expression describing this action, our "shorthorn" might have been able to remember it, but as time went by, he heard the same action described as "pulling leather," "touching leather," "taking leather," "squeezing Lizzie," "shaking hands with Grandma," "choking the leather," "choking the horn," "clawing leather," "grabbing the nubbin," "grabbing the post," and "reaching for the apple."

There was no question but what the "wandering waddy," and his home ranch pal, had plenty of variety in the way of language and description.

Because of the trouble the lad had had with his rope, several of the cowboys offered to help him get straightened out after they had gone to the "cook-shack" for the evening meal. One of them selected his favorite "lass-rope," and showed the "greener" how to "shake it out." This was the operation of widening the loop on the lariat just before throwing it. In some parts of the West, this was also referred to as "building a loop."

## A Help to the Indians

Our budding "buckaroo" then found out

[*Turn page*]

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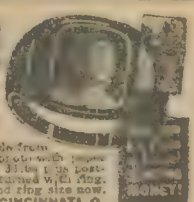

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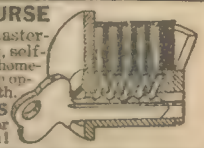

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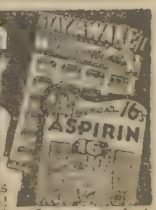


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that the end of the rope he held in his hand was known as the "home end." The other end was described as the "running end." But the thing that attracted his eye, and was also a fascinating item to most rangeland rookies was the "honda" or "hondo." This was the loop or small circle at the end of the lariat. The running end of the rope was put through the honda to form the big "loop" for roping.

"Hondas" were of several varieties. When the end of the rope was simply turned over in the form of a "bight," and fastened with string or wire, it was known as a "tied-rope" honda, because the rope itself was the most important item. When a piece of rawhide shaped into a loop was used to lessen the friction, and make the "bight" or "bend," it was referred to as a "rawhide honda." Some of the cowboys inserted a brass ring, with a groove to hold the shape of the rope, and this type of "honda" was naturally known as a "brass-ring honda."

As his experience grew and his knowledge of the Southwest expanded, he discovered that "honda" was another one of those words subject to a few different meanings in various parts of the country. In New Mexico and Arizona, and down in Sonora and Chihuahua, the word "honda" was used to describe a sling or carry-all made of rope or rawhide, and used by the "peons," and Indian squaws to carry water jars or "ollas," vegetables on the way to market, or young babies. Some stuff, these "hondas."

After learning the important parts of a lasso, the Easterner was prepared to go through the usual tenderfoot curriculum of trying to capture a fence-post, a corral gate, or the round knob on the porch railing.

"When yuh're able to do a 'hooligan' and a 'hoolihan', then we'll give yuh a diploma," one of the old-timers told him.

Here again, the tenderfoot's limited knowledge of Western lexicography hampered him, but his willing teachers told him that a "hooligan" was a twist of the roper's hand that made the loop stand on end; while a "hoolihan" was a form of rope cast in which the roper swung the rope backward instead of forward, so that the loop flattened out before it reached the animal's head.

With this information tucked away in his brain, the "Arbuckle" laughed as he said:

"I may not know so much more about roping and riding, but I do know what the words mean, when you start talking about those two subjects."

We hope you feel the same way about these two subjects the cowboy had a good many words to describe.

OUR TENDERFOOT LEARNS ALL ABOUT BRANDS AND BRANDING

*IN*

# THE COWBOY HAD A WORD FOR IT

NEXT ISSUE!

## TRAIL BLAZERS

*(Continued from page 8)*

As a rule simple protection of the area from fire, grazing and over-trapping will soon build-up the natural fur-bearing wildlife population.

Muskrats, 'coons, 'possums and mink are all aided by the construction of simple level ditches in marsh lands. The ditches afford better distribution of the water and provide banks for burrows for the animals.

In woodland sections save den trees as an important step in increasing your 'coon population. Without den trees 'coons won't stick around.

You may even be in a section where trapping and killing predatory animals whose pelts have value may be engaged in. The prime skins of bobcats, wolves, foxes, weazels and coyotes all have market value.

## Fish Farming

Fish farming is pretty new to the United States. But it is not a gag. It gets results.

A properly managed small farm pond having anywhere from 1 to 3 surface acres can produce from 200 to 300 pounds of fish per year per acre. And produce it economically, if the fish crop is regularly harvested to keep the pond "in balance" after stocking it the first season.

Ponds are usually stocked with bluegills and large-mouth black bass. Both of them fine eating and fun to catch. Ponds a year old will yield pound-and-a-half bass. Ponds can be stocked at the rate of about 1500 bluegill to 100 bass fingerlings per surface acre of water.

The fact is, hombres, that right today thousands of farmers are working their ponds for an annual fish crop. Many more having land permitting it are building small ponds of their own for this special purpose.

## Fertilized Water!

Down south the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station has done a lot of fine pioneer spade work in figuring out the know-how of this special new kind of farming. One of their ideas, and it seems to work out, is that fertilizing water is every bit as helpful as fertilizing land—if you want bumper crops.

As a result "fish" farmers have begun applying ordinary commercial fertilizer to their ponds—strewing it broadcast over the water from a small boat, or flinging it out from the shore. It works out this way. The fertilizer provides food elements for the microscopic plants and growths in the pond that provide food for the minute animals and aquatic insects. The insects in turn provide food for forage fish like bream or sunfish with which the pond is stocked.

The forage fish then afford tasty meals for the carnivorous fish like bass. It is a long chain. But it achieves well-fed bass. And bass is the final crop. They are dandy eating and a protein-rich supplement to the farm family larder.

Even without fertilizer, ponds will yield fish. But experiments have shown that such ponds usually give half the bass poundage of fertilized ponds. [*Turn page*]


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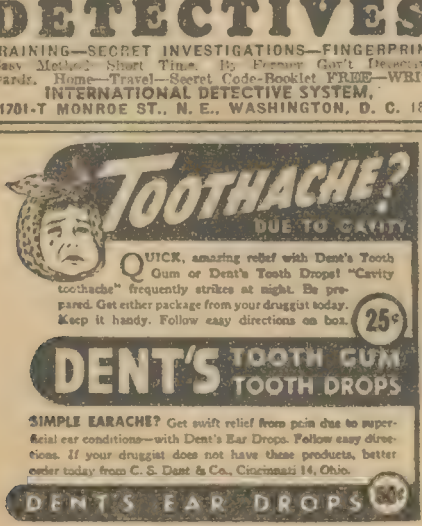
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About three or four applications of fertilizer a summer are generally sufficient, and the pond should contain a ratio of roughly 3 pounds of forage fish for every pound of carnivorous fish for best results.

For the establishment of a "fish" farm the pond, though it need not be large, should be one which maintains, or can be made to maintain a reasonably constant water level.

## Other Sidelines

More common farm sidelines are poultry, or turkey raising. Turkey meat is economical to produce because a turkey gets about 25% of its feed from range or pasture—at the same time eating a surprising quantity of unwanted bugs and insect pests.

An average farm flock might consist of from 4 to 10 turkey hens and 1 "gobbler." In such a flock natural incubation methods are usually practised. That is, the turkey hen hatches the eggs and broods the young poults.

In the past disease caused loss of many young turkeys, but this can be brought under control by care and proper raising methods. Back in colonial days turkeys were raised primarily in New England, and the Eastern States. Then the center shifted to the Midwestern States. Today most of our huge crop of the national bird comes from farms and ranches in the West and Southwest.

Chicken raising is really more than a specialty. It is a recognized part of good farming. Family size flocks consist of 50 birds or less, kept primarily to supply eggs for the table and chicken now and then for Sunday dinner.

Commercial poultry farming in which the number of birds may run from 400 to 100,000 isn't a sideline. It is a skilled business in itself.

There are lots of ways to make that farm land tract produce special money-saving or money-making items. We have mentioned a few, but not all of them by any means. Remember there's no law against a farmer or prospective farmer using his head as well as his hands. As in other lines the process usually gets results—out West as well as elsewhere.

Thanks for listenin' to my palaver, folks. See you all again next issue!

—CAPTAIN RANGER.

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

WOULD you like a whole lot of good, hearty laughs mixed with equal amount of rapid-fire Western thrills? If so, get ready for just that! Y' see—

W. C. Tuttle appeared in EXCITING WESTERN for October with his swell novel, GUN THUNDER IN BROKEN BOW. He'll be following it up with another saga of the rangeland in the next issue—a complete novel entitled BANDIT BUSTERS. This is a rip-snorter that involves the killing by "person or persons unknown" of Ollie West, Cattlemen's Protective Association detective.

There is no evidence, according to a telegram received by Jim Keaton, secretary of the association, who is Ollie's cousin. The wire is signed by Bill Walters, Sheriff of Broken Bow, who is known as "Caliente."

In the yarn you'll meet, and enjoy the adventures of, "Tombstone" Jones and "Speedy"

Smith, those two shiftless but lovable ne'er-do-well rannies. They are unexpectedly sworn in as deputies by Caliente. Then the excitement begins!

George Akers, the banker, is robbed by a lone-masked bandit. All the banker can tell about his assailant is that he is left-handed. June Adel, a wealthy rancher's daughter, is kidnaped. And there's a secret band of sneaky rustlers.

With six-guns, shotguns, changed brands, red-eye, and lusty poker games, all heck is shure a-poppin'!

We know you enjoy W. C. Tuttle's flavorsome, appealing style. After meeting Tombstone Jones and Speedy Smith, we're sure you'll howl for more. Tombstone and Speedy just don't just blunder into things either. They actually solve the crime in their own rollicking manner. You'll enjoy every detail of the way they do it.

Back with us again, also in the next issue, will be Navajo Tom Raine, the Arizona Ranger, in PASSPORT TO PERDITION, by Jackson Cole. It all revolves around the gold-greedy town of Lodestone and the Golden Queen mine.

Milo Kearn now owns the mine, although he has stolen it from Bill Downer, whom he had doublecrossed. Downer has sworn to get Kearn or die in the attempt, so an armed raid on the mine is planned. There is only one thing that stands in the way of Downer's vengeance—The Law, in the shape of Navajo Raine.

We all know that Navajo has a code of his own, the crux of that code being to kill only when there is no other choice. He is dedicated to seeing justice done, whatever the personal risk. [*Turn page*]


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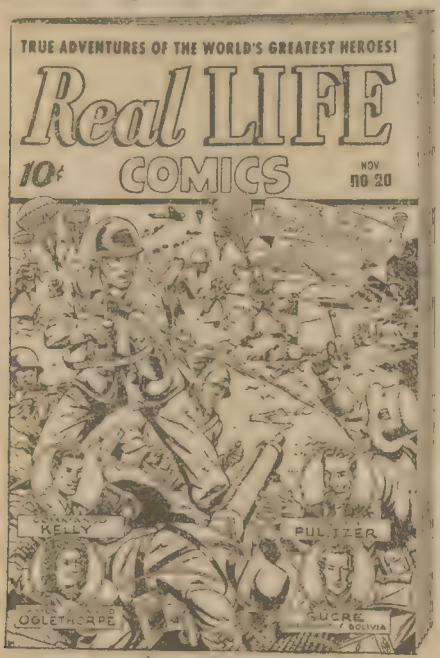


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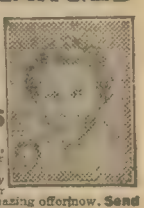

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Navajo is not without sympathy for the man he has so relentlessly to track down. That's why he handles this case in his own way—a way that will surprise you. PASSPORT TO PERDITION has a gripping dramatic quality and you'll certainly like those Downer kids, Pike and Tobe. If you're looking for a tense, colorful yarn of the Old West—this is it!

Also, we know no issue of EXCITING WESTERN would seem complete without an Alamo Paige story, so our pal Reeve Walker sat down to his typewriter to turn out a novelet that is really a thriller, called THE TRIAL OF ALAMO PAIGE.

Old "Nugget" Stanton strikes it rich on Fair Play Creek and things look mighty bright for the old prospector and his daughter Marjorie, the prettiest girl for miles around. Then they find old Nugget treacherously knifed. The crime is pinned on—Alamo Paige!

There was a will in the form of a letter that old Stanton left, bequeathing the mine to his daughter and the Pony Express Rider. Of course "Big Jim" McCandles, the boss of Placerville, which is known to all and sundry as "Hangtown," has always had his eye on the mine and wants it for himself.

Alamo Paige is brought to trial, right out in the Great Outdoors. Trumped-up evidence begins to pile up against him. But those two-fisted hombres, the Pony Express Riders, aren't going to let their pal dance on air at the end of a hangrope! However, Alamo won't accept freedom unless he is given an opportunity to clear his name.

How he gathers together evidence, often at the risk of his life, we wouldn't dream of telling you now because that would naturally spoil your enjoyment of the story.


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We might add, however, that there is a thread of romance running through the yarn—and Marjorie Stanton is right fond of Alamo Paige. Does he fall for her? Well, just you wait and see!

There will again be the usual assortment of fast-paced Western short stories, and Captain Ranger will again serve up his TRAIL BLAZERS department in his entertaining way.

Write and tell us what you think of the magazine—for we are always eager to learn whether we are making the grade with our readers or not. Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, EXCITING WESTERN, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

Here's a suggestion from the Tar Heel State that some of our readers might approve of while others will not. As it is somewhat controversial, we thought it might stir up a bit of a hornet's nest that'll get you prospective letter-writers pepped up:

I've been reading EXCITING WESTERN a long time and think it is swell. I enjoy Alamo Paige and Navajo Raine a good deal.

Say, why don't you publish a book length novel on Alamo Paige or Alamo and Raine together? Don't get me wrong. I'm not kicking or trying to run your business, but I like to be helpful.—*Horace McPherson, Elizabeth City, N. C.*

We appreciate your letter, Horace. Suggestions like yours are the kind that show a real interest in what we are trying to do. Let's us hear from you at any time!

Here's another one from the Old Dominion which speaks for itself:

I have been reading EXCITING WESTERN and your other Western books for two years and think they are tops. Alamo Paige and Navajo Raine stories ought to be longer since they are so good.

Well, keep the girls out as I saw where some of the boys said these heroes ought to have girl friends.

Some day I hope to go West and get me a job cowpunching. Well, keep the books coming. *Adios.* —*Carl Jones, Parker, Va.*

Thanks, Carl, and we hope you get your wish about going West. And maybe when you read THE TRIAL OF ALAMO PAIGE next issue you'll like Marjorie Stanton so much you'll change your mind about girls in stories!

Happy reading, everybody!

—THE EDITOR.

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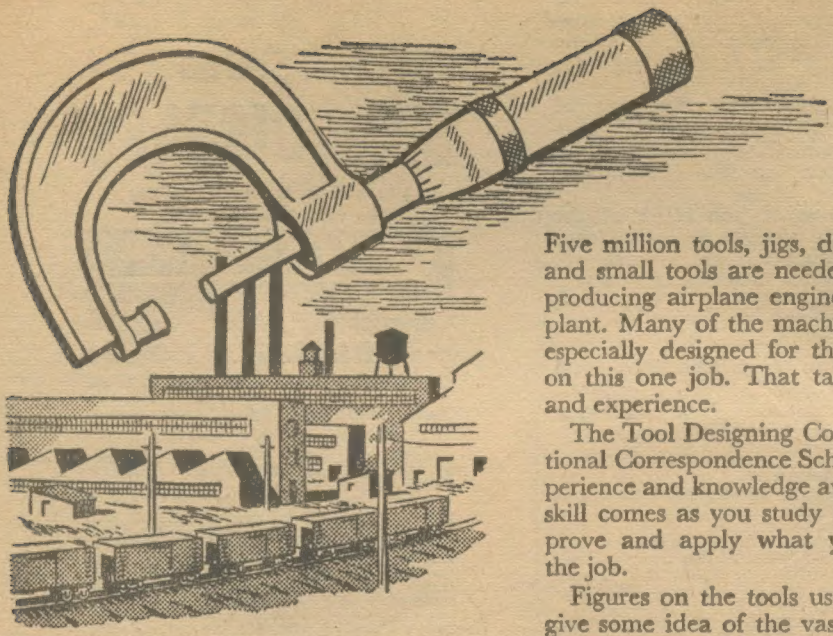

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**Chemistry Schools**
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
- ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

**Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Schools**
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Bridge Engineering
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Lumber Dealer
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

**Electrical Schools**
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Power House Electrician
- ☐ Practical Electrician
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

**Internal Combustion Engines School**
- ☐ Auto Technician ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Diesel-Electric
- ☐ Diesel Engines ☐ Gas Engines

**Mechanical Schools**
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering
- ☐ Airplane Drafting
- ☐ Flight Engineer
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Design
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Drafting ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steel Mill Workers
- ☐ Tool Designing
- ☐ Welding, Gas and Electric

**Radio School**
- ☐ Electronics ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing

**Railroad School**
- ☐ Air Brake ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman

**Steam Engineering Schools**
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Engine Running
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Steam Electric
- ☐ Steam Engines

**Textile School**
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Rayon Weaving
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

**Business and Academic Schools**
- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Arithmetic ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ City Letter Carrier
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics
- ☐ Illustrating
- ☐ Motor Traffic
- ☐ Post Office Clerk
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

**Language School**
- ☐ Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Good English

*Name*..... *Age*..... *Home Address*.....

*Present Position*..... *Working Hours*.....A.M. to.....P.M.

*City*..... *State*.....

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Here's a sturdy "he-man's" jacket of a thousand and one uses that will keep pace with the fastest tempo of your busy day. Cut for real comfort—of "Spun-Rite"—magically flexible, water-repellent and shape-retaining as well as warm. Snappy yoked back. Genuine leather buttons for looks and wear. Grand, deep, saddlepockets. Split sides—so stride along as you will. You'll live in it from dawn 'til night. Choose Camel Tan with the following choice of harmonizing colors: Forest Green or Luggage Brown. Check your size from 34 to 50 on the order coupon below.

Ladies! Men! Here's the Jacket "buy" you've been waiting for. Here's quality, style, comfort and durability all combined in one to give you the finest, smartest jacket you'll find anywhere, regardless of price. And when you order the two together — one lady's and one man's jacket—you get two jackets for only $7.95.

Save 95c! Everyone — wife and husband, girl-friend and beau will want to order matching jackets in combination on this special bargain offer. You SEND NO MONEY! We'll ship C.O.D. plus a few cents postage. If you don't agree this is the greatest Jacket Bargain you've ever seen for the price, return it within 10 days and your money will be cheerfully refunded.

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500 N. Dearborn St., CHICAGO 10, ILL.

Gentlemen: Send me the SPUN-RITE Jackets indicated below C.O.D. I must be fully satisfied with my purchase or will return within 10 days for refund.

Name ..... Please

Address ..... write

City ..... State ..... plainly

LADY'S JACKET Sale Price $3.95 | Camel Tan | Liberty Red

Check color wanted

Combination Price for 1 Man's & 1 Lady's Jacket Both only $7.95

MEN'S JACKET Sale Price $4.95 | Camel Tan with these colors | Luggage Brown | Forest Green

Check color wanted

CHECK SIZES WANTED 44☐, 46☐, 48☐, 50☐

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